

Sensemaking in Turbulence -

An Analysis of the Merger of the Central University of Technology from a Sensemaking Perspective

KHOMOTSO MOETANALO HILDA MARUMO

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Supervisor: Mr CH Maasdorp
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DECLARATION

I, Khomotso Moetanalo Hilda Marumo, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this thesis is my own original work and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it at any university for a degree.

Signature:

Date:

OPSOMMING

Hierdie studie neem as vertrekpunt die observasie van singewingsteorie dat outonومiese aktivering gepaard gaan met 'n verlies aan bestaande raamwerke en aanduidings en die gevolglike kognitiewe implosie. Sulke situasies word gekenmerk deur 'n krisis in identiteitskonstruksie en gevolglike verlies aan sin. Die doel van hierdie studie was om uit te vind tot watter mate hierdie fenomeen plaasvind tydens 'n samesmelting van organisasies, en spesifiek hoe dit manifesteer onder die werknemers van die Sentrale Universiteit van Tegnologie in Welkom na die samesmelting van die Welkom-kampus van Vista Universiteit en die Technikon Vrystaat.

Die studie begin met 'n oorsig van die literatuur oor korporatiewe samesmeltings en oornames, spesifiek oor daardie studies wat die effekte bestudeer met betrekking tot (i) hoe verskillend mans en vroue geraak is, (ii) die impak van verskillende vlakke van ervaring onder werknemers se persepsies oor die samesmelting, (iii) die mate waartoe die kwalifikasievlak van werknemers, asook (iv) ras 'n rol gespeel het in die vlak van outonومiese aktivering wat deur werknemers ervaar is.

Daarna word singewingsteorie en die aard en geleentheid van outonومiese aktivering uitepak. Daar word argumenteer dat korporatiewe samesmelting 'n onderbreking in die vloei van sin veroorsaak wat tot outonومiese aktivering kan lei.

Gelei deur singewingsteorie en outonومiese aktivering as teoretiese vertrekpunt is onderhoude gevoer met sleutelfigure in die spesifieke samesmelting tussen die Welkom kampus van Vista Universiteit en die Technikon Vrystaat om die outonومiese effek van die onderbreking te illustreer. Die respondente is deur die sneeubalmetode geselekteer. Die idee is om te toon hoe werknemers emosioneel getref is en hoedat dit 'n impak op hulle persepsies rondom hulle werk tot gevolg gehad het.

Daar is bevind dat die vloei van sin deur die samesmelting onderbreek is, en dat werknemers soos te wagte, meer op persoonlik sake begin fokus. Dit dui op 'n vernouing van singewingsraamwerke en die verlies van lewensin.

SUMMARY

This study takes as starting point the observation in sensemaking theory that autonomic arousal is accompanied by a loss of existing frames and cues and the consequential cognitive implosion. Situations such as these are marked by a crisis in identity construction and the resultant loss of sense being made. The aim of the study was to find out to what extent this phenomenon is at play during a merger between two organizations. Specifically to what extent this phenomenon did manifest itself among the employees of the Central University of Technology in Welkom after the merger of the former Welkom Campus of Vista University and the Technikon Free State.

The study starts with an overview of the literature on corporate mergers; focusing on research on effects with regards to (i) how the different gender groups of employees were affected by these interruptions, (ii) how employees with diverse levels of experience were affected, (iii) to what extent the qualifications of employees was a factor regarding the impact of this autonomic arousal and (iv) whether race was a factor in determining the extent of autonomic arousal.

The above is followed by an explanation of the sensemaking perspective and the nature of and moment for autonomic arousal. It is argued that organizational mergers represent an interruption in the ongoing flow of sensemaking that could lead to autonomic arousal.

Using sensemaking theory and autonomic arousal as a theoretical starting point, interviews were conducted with key figures in the specific merger between the Vista University Welkom Campus and the Technikon Free State. The respondents were selected using the snowballing sampling technique. The idea behind the interviews was to demonstrate how staff members were emotionally affected by the interruption of the merger and how it had an impact on their perceptions about their work.

It was found that the flow of experience was interrupted and as cues and frames were reduced, the employees focussed more on personal issues.

Key words:

Autonomic arousal, interruptions, merger, performance, sensemaking and uncertainty.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CUT	Central University of Technology, Free State
FR	Female Respondents
HE	Higher Education
HEI	Higher Education Institutions
MANCOM	Management Committee
MBSA	Management by screening around
MBWA	Management by walking around
MR	Male Respondents
NCHE	National Commission of Higher Education
NEPI	National Education Policy Investigation
NPHE	National Plan of Higher Education
NWG	National Working Group
TFS	Technikon Free State
VUWC	Vista University Welkom Campus

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This study investigates the effects of a merger between two dissimilar higher education institutions (HEI) in the Free State Province of South Africa, namely Technikon Free State (TFS) and Vista University, Welkom Campus (VUWC), leading to the formation of the Central University of Technology (CUT). In order to systematize the investigation and the discussion thereof, this chapter proceeds first to provide the background to the study by briefly looking at the issue of mergers in higher education in South Africa. From there, I will proceed to unpack the problem of the investigation, focusing mainly on the research question and the aim, objectives and methodology of the investigation. Finally, I will define operational concepts so that the study can be on the same wavelength with the rest of the reading and/or research community out of which the study issues.

1.2 Mergers in higher education in South Africa

Organisations use mergers to meet their goals, for growth and for developmental needs. Since 1994, South Africa has experienced many challenges of transformation such as mergers in organisations and in Higher Education Institutions (HEI). There were a lot of inequalities in Universities and Technikons in South Africa prior to 1994 that compelled the National Commission of Higher Education (NCHE) to look into the merging of Higher Education Institutions (HEI).

According to the White Paper of Higher Education, 1997 the policy of Government to restructure and transform Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) is aimed at meeting the learning needs of individuals, promoting equity access, addressing the development needs of society, contributing to a democratic ethos and the socialisation of citizens, and contributing to the creation, sharing and evaluation of knowledge. According to White Paper 3, the central focus of a merger was to establish a single national coordinated system that would meet the individual needs of citizens and the reconstruction and development needs of the country (Ministry of Education, NPHE 2001).

The National Plan of Higher Education (NPHE) of 2001 gives effect to the White Paper by setting targets for the so called “sizes and shapes” of the higher education system, including the composition of institutions and programs and the growth and participation to be realised where registration has to be in different disciplines and be transferred from humanities to Science, Engineering and Technology in order to satisfy the needs of the labour market.

The announcement of the merging of HEIs in May 2002 is a major component of the new higher education system to be put into place. This led to the restructuring of institutions envisaged in the National Plan which was preceded by the National Working Group (NWG) which recommended the reduction of HEIs from 36 to 21, where certain universities had to merge with technikons.

Merger is seen as a final nail to the coffin of academic freedom and autonomy. Nothing is left of freedom and autonomy when institutions are forcefully merged with others. This policy seeks new creation from the of higher education system. It was forceful because universities may not decide which courses to offer, who will teach what, what research will be conducted and to whom they will award qualifications (Malherbe, 2003). It was not a matter of institutional choice as most of the organisations had different ideas about the mergers.

The new institutional landscape had to be formulated and this led to the merging of most of HEIs in South Africa. The National Department of Education realised then that HEIs must merge if the playing field was to be levelled. These mergers were imposed on institutions and they were given tight timeframes within which to complete the process. To HEIs, all these were spear-headed by the National Government: Department of Education.

How mergers were understood, conceptualised and perceived differed from employee to employee and institution to institution. Some employees looked at the mergers with the fear of losing a job, as well as the financial impact thereof. To some mergers were seen as the end of their careers and everything they worked for, hoped for and aspired for. Feelings of frustration, anxiety and loss of commitment, demoralisation and fear of change were observed (Hay, Fourie & Hay 2001:103). On the other hand, some organisations saw mergers as a better strategic approach, to generate value, to boost research, to maximise utilisation of existing facilities and to address the issue of equity.

1.3 Problem statement

The primary focus of the merger in any institution should be to improve overall performance. When one reflects back at how the mergers occurred in HEI, more especially in South Africa, the primary purpose seems to have been more political. Although the mergers are all planned, there is some negativity in them because the planning is based on financial and legal aspects, at the expense of the human factor. For the mergers to succeed, it is imperative that the human factor be the first aspect to be considered, the reason being that all processes in any organisation are focused on human resources. The problem at the CUT is that the merger came when the institution was still having some issues that needed to be solved and be resolved.

Transformation of the country, South Africa, impacted negatively on the merger of these two institutions (TFS and VUWC), because of their historical background. The CUT is facing uncertainty as to what the future environment will be like. These uncertainties necessitate responses to the changing of the institutional environment such as staffing.

The empirical research undertaken concerning the effect of mergers on staff performance should identify some critical challenges that institutions need to take, that is cognisance action from a sensemaking perspective. The CUT is now operating in a changing, uncertain, complex environment whereby uncertainty plays a major role. The environmental change which was influenced from external and internal organisational structures played a major role. The merger had affected staff negatively and this in turn affected their emotions, family and work. Most studies, (Leyshon 2001, Weber 2001)¹ reveal that mergers have a negative impact on the economic performance of the organisations. The research question in this study addresses staff performance in terms of their emotional aspects and how mergers affect staff well-being, where finally it affects their performance.

1.4 The focus of the study

The main aim of this study is to apply a sensemaking theory to some aspects of the events surrounding the merger of CUT in order to understand how interruptions influence staff performance.

Sensemaking theory is chosen because it provides us with a highly developed set of diagnostics which will allow us to interpret reactions caused by uncertainty and interruptions.

¹ The information is from the article written by different researchers.

The impact of the merger is perceived through different behaviours which ultimately impacts on the change process, which causes tension that leads to uncertainty, low morale and to emotional exhaustion which slowly leads to poor performance in individuals, professionals, departmental or divisional and institutional levels.

1.5 Staff variables investigated in the study

The merger took place in a specific political and cultural context. Sensemaking theory cannot be applied without taking these into account. To amplify the research question it was therefore necessary to do an empirical scan of conditions and opinions at the time of the merger. In particular it was important to find out how different categories of staff experienced the effects of the merger, especially those emotional aspects that may contribute to poor performance. It was hypothesised that the following factors were of importance in this respect

- female staff compared to their male staff members
- less experienced compared to more experienced staff
- levels of academic qualifications and positions
- race

1.6 Methodology

This thesis is based primarily on a literature study. However, in order to understand the objective conditions during the merger better, an empirical investigation was done at the CUT, guided by the staff variables listed above. The picture of the overall effect of the merger, and how psychological processes were handled, was constructed on the basis of an interface between the empirical work and relevant literature.

It must be repeated that all along focus was provided by the primary question how those institutions *make sense*. In this respect the sensemaking theory of Karl E Weick provided the basis on which the analysis was done. Although many have written about the mergers and their outcomes, most if not all are merely empirical. However, in this research the focus will be on how *sensemaking* insights could assist us in understanding some of the failures of the merger process. The main issue now is how a sensemaking theory can help institutions to understand the effects of the mergers on staff. How a sensemaking theory can be used to interpret, identify, and perhaps rectify fundamental problems.

Sensemaking is a broad area of study. In this study we will limit ourselves to the following aspects of sensemaking: autonomic arousal, identity construction, leadership, and decision making.

1.7 Outline of the chapters

This research is divided into eight chapters. The first chapter is an introduction and background of the study.

Chapters two, three and four introduce various theoretical and historical aspects relevant to this study.

Chapter two outlines the broad background of mergers in South Africa, while chapter three presents a literature review as framed by the staff variables mentioned above.

Chapter four sets out key aspects of sensemaking in organizations which will provide the basis for the analysis that follows.

Chapters five, six and seven are focused on the CUT.

Chapter five gives an overview of the process of the merger. The methodology of the empirical study is fully described in chapter six, while chapter seven discusses the results of the analysis.

The empirical findings of this study are analyzed and comparisons are made with presentation from chapter two. Comparisons and findings of what the CUT is affected by are drawn from the case studies discussed in chapter two and the linkage to part of chapter four, where sensemaking is discussed.

The summary and the findings of this study draw the main conclusion and present recommendations for future research in chapter eight.

CHAPTER 2

MERGERS IN HIGHER EDUCATION: THE BROAD PICTURE

2.1 An overview of frameworks for the mergers in higher education

Mergers are classified in terms of the academic focus and activities. These classifications have been introduced in the literature from private sector merger typologies that use business line and their type of products as structuring dimensions. Some have been substituted to suit the academic activity, teaching and research. Goudegebuure as quoted by Hall, Symes and Luescher (2004:15-16) classified mergers as:

- A Horizontal merger: is between institutions that operate in similar academic fields and are oriented towards a similar type of product.
- A Vertical merger: is between institutions which operate in a similar academic fields and are oriented towards a different type of product
- A Conglomerate merger: is between institutions which operate in different academic fields and are oriented towards a different kind of product.
- A Diversification merger: is between institutions which operate in different academic fields and are oriented towards a similar type of product and where institutions are oriented around different academic fields and products, differences in institutional styles and culture would be wholly unsurprising, and could impact quite strongly on mergers, processes and outcomes.²

Some of the HEIs in South Africa were forced to merge by the National Department of Education. Botha (2001) indicated that although the majority of the HEI sectors responded to the proposed restructuring in a negative way, the Ministry of Education was persistent in seeing mergers in higher education being implemented.

² From Hall, M., Symes, A. & Luescher, T. 2004. The Governance of Mergers in South African Higher Education: A Research Report prepared for CHE. p. 15.

De Wet (2004) indicated that as institutions were forced to merge, institutions involved in these specific mergers had different views. The HEIs were of the opinion that they have no choice but to adhere to the Government. Fortunately enough, the then TFS as the receiving institution did not feel the pressure of the changes the same as VUWC did. Perception to most of the TFS staff was that a merger will not affect them. For the TFS and the VUWC, the atmosphere was that of friendliness and cooperation. Both institutions treated each other as 'equal partners'. One could deduce from the types of mergers mentioned above, that the CUT followed the framework of the diversification mergers, as the two institutions mentioned have different academic fields.³

2.2 The role of political factors in mergers in higher education

Mergers were regarded as a solution to balance the higher education system in the new South Africa. Mapesela and Hay (2005) highlighted that even though the aims of the mergers were to rectify the imbalances of the past, implementation and formulation of policies in HE were rather slow. Issues such as equity, unequal employment opportunities for people of different race groups, gender inequality, cues in terms of competences, directly or indirectly, have influence on satisfaction and performance of staff.

The above is contracted against the National Education Policy Investigation (NEPI 1992) which had recognised that it is necessary to take the needs of staff seriously. The idea behind the NEPI recommendation was to take the staff in higher education through improvement of their qualifications, giving them skills to be able to cope and deal with the changing institutional environment.

The NCHE (1996) prescribed a workable framework and identified some fundamental principles which aimed to guide and direct the process of mergers in HE. These principles especially had an effect on staff because the merging of two different institutions with different (academic) backgrounds had a vast impact on staff in terms of the programmes offered, teaching staff employed and space. This study has become necessary because staff felt that their need, importantly their jobs, had been interrupted. They felt helpless as they had no choice. This had a negative impact on staff as they realised that the scope of their work is beyond the level of being managed, either increasing or minimized out of existence.

³ As mentioned on page 16 of this study under 2.1 from Goudegebuure as quoted by Hall, Symes and Luescher (2004:15-16) classification of mergers

Smither (2002) indicated that since the news of merging came as a shock to the HE world, power struggles may erupt over which jobs might be eliminated. South African Higher Education Institutions was not an exception. Mergers in HEIs, especially in South African Universities and Technikons, came as a shock too to management of the institutions, staff members and communities at large. The forceful merger became a shock that left staff/survivors after merging feeling more than a bit anxious, confused and guilty, where the worst was imagined. Though it was a shock, the fact of the matter is how organisations had to make sense of these changing environments where performance is affected. The questions of why institutions merged, why different institutions with different academic profiles had to merge was previously discussed in the literature.

2.3 Reasons for mergers in higher education

According to Dayaram (2005), the reasons for mergers are to build institutional strength via the development of human resources, building economies of scales and a redistribution of resources between previously advantaged and disadvantaged institutions. The National Plan for Higher Education in South Africa (2001:88) has some goals that were articulated by the then Minister of Education in the White Paper 3 (WP3, 1997). These goals are (i) to serve as a guide to framework of transformation and (ii) to increase access, (iii) promote equity, redress past demographic inequalities, (iv) to ensure diversity and (v) to meet national and regional skills and knowledge needs that will build on research capacity and (vi) to re-organise the institutional landscape and establish new forms and identities, (vii) to overcome the apartheid induced fragmentation between a historically white and a historically black institution that will ensure effective and efficient use of resources, (viii) to reduce the overlapping and duplication in academic programmes, (vix) to enhance governance, administrative, management and leadership structures, (x) to develop programmes to meet the human resources needs in the regions, and (xi) to increase in size the institutions with reduction of unit costs.

2.4 Lessons from the financial sector

According to Cartwright and Coopers (1992:18-19), there are factors that have influenced the increase of mergers in financial sectors, which are perceived to have some influence in mergers of higher education such as transfer of knowledge, increase control, increase market share, reduce uncertainty and on psychological level to satisfy the needs of individuals or

small groups of individuals whereby they enhance their own self-confidence. Another motive is to exercise power on availability of capital. The other motives for mergers were to simplify regulations when developing their infrastructure, change the regulation about ownership and foreign investment policies. Mergers exist to promote sharing of resources which will save costs. Other researchers see reasons for mergers as a way to improve capacity utilisation, enhance coverage of sales force, reduce managerial staff, gain economies of scale, smooth out seasonal sales trends, gain access to new suppliers, gain new technology and reduce tax obligations. By looking at the reasons or motives above, it shows that it is all about the institutions or organisations, but there is no emphasis on staff or human factors.

2.5 Pragmatic reasons for mergers

The primary purpose of mergers in any organisation is to improve the overall performance by achieving synergy between two different organisations that became one. HEIs in South Africa have been involved in merging processes which have an impact on staff performance. This shows that when planning of mergers is discussed, human relations should not be neglected. Factors should be discussed in depth. Some of the factors that contributed to the effect of merger on staff performance are that the merger was not a voluntary phenomenon to institutions; this was imposed by Government to ensure diversity in the institutional landscape of the higher education system.

The main idea of merging HEIs in South Africa was not based on cost-cutting, but to merge the disadvantaged institutions with the advantaged institutions, irrespective of the location. In South Africa, more specifically in HEIs, merging is a recent phenomenon, and a new concept which emerged in the 1990's. Mergers are a global phenomenon which was more common in banking, financial, commerce and health sectors. Internationally, mergers are not a new phenomenon in education. There are mergers dating back to the 20th century. For example, in 1991, the Legislature of the State of Minnesota mandated the merger of the technical college, community college and the state university systems by 1995.⁴ The reason was to reduce duplication among institutions and to differentiate the mission of Minnesota's four higher education systems. Many countries abroad had gone through mergers, where most of the mergers had failed because some factors were not thoroughly looked into.

⁴ Ola Program Evaluation Division, Office of the Legislative Auditor. State of Minnesota. Higher Education Administrative and Student Services Spending: Technical College, Community College and State Universities

2.6 The rationale for mergers

According to Dayaram (2005:71), the challenges that are facing South African education systems are rooted in historical prejudices. This historical prejudice is that the legacy of the past which promotes practices that are based on gender, racial and cultural domination are still prevalent. All these dimensions had an effect on performance and it failed to reflect South African demographics. The ratio of staff in institutions is still dominated by white males, more especially in managerial positions, whereas the ratio of students in some HEIs is dominated by black students. The Department of Education requested HEIs to send out statistics and information about their institutions. The results were sent by HEIs themselves to the Minister of Education and he obliged the South African Education decision makers to institute a National Committee to prepare the Education Management report. It is from this report that HEI were led to mergers.

This study is of high priority because each institution has its own reasons which are different from each other. This is based on the type of services and products the institutions offered. Even though there is proof that most mergers are doomed even before they could take place, yet mergers still continue to take place.

The following are indicated as the scenario that necessitated mergers and the rationale that motivated mergers:

- The fragmented further and higher education system inherited from the pre-1994 Government(s), which led to a vertically and horizontally fragmented system along provincial and racial lines (Hay, Fourie & Hay 2001:100; Wyngaard & Kapp 2004: 187)
- Unequal distribution of resources and subsidy among further and higher education institutions (Hay , Fourie & Hay 2001:100)
- The declining state subsidy mainly as a result of poor economic growth (Hay, Fourie & Hay 2001:100)
- The impact of legislation (SAQA,NQF, Skill Development Act, Skills Development Levy, Labour Relations Act, Affirmative Action) which changed the profile of institutions and which resulted in the permanent appointment of temporary staff, increased salaries and the expansion of basic fringe benefits to all members of staff, (Hay, Fourie & Hay 2001:100; Wyngaard & Kapp 2004: 187)

- Increased geographic market share resulting in greater access to both the population served and more funders (Yankey, Wester & Campbell 1998:500).

2.7 Reasons for the failure of mergers

Naidoo (2005) indicated that a merger begins with identification of an opportunity and if the potential partner is interested, the processes of the merger will start. The major cause of failure is the dichotomy between the deal making and integration phase. In higher education, the complexity of mergers is attributed to the absence of identification of opportunities and interest that generally marks the forced mergers pronounced by the Government. I also support Naidoo's ideas that failure in higher education can be caused by lack of letting institutions choose their own partners. Lack of a clear integration plan resulted in a loss of vital sources of strategic leverage needed by institutions to add value. The integration plan can include technologies, policies, culture, identity and autonomy of the institutions. Shift of institution focus leads to failure of mergers because focus was on financial and political aspects while the human factor was ignored (see 2.8 below).

Based on observation in higher education it is known that institutional mergers fail because of cultural clashes, self-interest and autonomy. But the main cause of mergers to fail is due to lack of leadership to inspire others to follow and to consider the human factor. According to Cartwright and Coopers (1992:22), there are some of the causes that cause mergers to fail such as unfavourable impact on productivity, which have become associated with higher absenteeism and poorer accident rates, rather than greater profitability.

According to Kujala and Weinmann (2003:3), there is enormous tension where in the end, the synergistic potential in the merger is not realised. Examples of such synergies are financial advantages such as economies of scale, tax savings, strategic advantages such as vertical and horizontal position within the industry and knowledge economy related to sharing, transferring and developing knowledge.

From a financial point of view studies have shown that mergers have come up with a success story. This is based on the costs capital criteria. McKinsey consultants, as quoted by Morosini (1998) in Valpola (2001:38) found that, based on the cost of capital criteria, 61% of the acquisition programs from samples of 116 US, Canada and UK based companies failed, where 23% were successful and 16% were unknown. Irrespective of the statistics above, research evidence proved that mergers have had unfavourable impact on profitability. Research made by the Department of Trade and Industry in 1986 (British Institute of

Management,1986) found that there had been no improvement in the intervening years, and the failure rate of mergers is still running at around 50%. In a report from Hunt (1988), success rates of post-acquisitions were in the region of 50% (Cartwright & Coopers 1992; Valpola 2001).

Vaara (2000) indicated that since the beginning of the 1980's, mergers and acquisitions have increasingly involved a combination of companies operating in similar businesses and competing directly with each other. At the outset of his study Vaara (2000) maintains that little is known of organizational integration. McKinsey concluded by saying mergers in companies fail because companies focus too much on cutting costs, while revenues as ultimate profits suffer. He said companies neglect day-to- day business which prompt nerves.

2.8 Mergers without human relations: a catastrophe

This study has become important because experience have shown that for mergers of most institutions and organisations to be successful, human assets are important. Each merger has its unique features. There are features that make the mergers successful such as staffing, research, governance, management and geographical (demographic) issues. Even if mergers were planned in HEIs by the National Department of Education, the focus was on diversity, financial human resources and legal aspects. The end results are that mergers ended up with poor results and poor human effect. Staff dysfunctional reaction to mergers can be aggravated depending on how the interruption is managed.

2.9 Conclusion

The chapter gave the background of why mergers came into existence, more especially in South African High Education. The rationale of the mergers as initiated by the National Ministry of Education and the reasons why mergers took place is discussed in this chapter. The complexity that caused mergers to fail such as shift of institutional focus, financial, political and human relations are discussed.

CHAPTER 3

THE IMPACT OF MERGERS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

3.1 Introduction

Shin (2003) indicated that life is accompanied by changes in environment, feelings, attitudes, performance and behaviours. This is the same with a merger as it often brings tremendous changes that have great impact on staff performance. Staff in a merged institution undergo great distress which is related to uncertainty, anxiety which affect their future, cause stress, loss of control and low morale. The stress emanate from failure to communicate. Failure to communicate leaves staff being uncertain about the future. This becomes stressful to staff and it leads to other means for reducing uncertainty such as rumours and gossiping (Dayarama 2005; Mfusi 2004; Schweiger and Denisi 1991:110-111; Vaara 1999). This chapter will focus on evidence regarding the overall impact of mergers, how the psychological process is handled, and how mergers have influenced staff performance.

The announcement of mergers in HEIs had an impact on staff, department and institutions. The first impact of mergers in HE is that institutions were not given a chance to choose their partner; it was a decision taken by the Department of Education of the National Government. Secondly, the reduction of institutions left different institutions with different academic structures to merge. For example, some technikons merged with universities, which in themselves have a clash of interest, academic background, cultural clash and distance between the two institutions. Attempts of institutions are to meet the multiple challenges caused by mergers with intentions to increase institutional bureaucracy and increase managerial style. This is an attempt to direct the implementation of mergers and to keep the merged institutions efficient. The effect of the complex environment is observed by all members of the institution from academic to non-academic staff who are either frustrated by the increased workload, perceiving the merger to be organisational managerial budgetary exercises. Tension established at the newly merged institutions brings the institutions back to the importance of human factors and diversity (Hall, Symes and Luescher 2004).

The South African higher education fraternity is currently overwhelmed by mergers which have socio-political implications as well as transformation to respond to national higher education policy. The purpose of the mergers, with the idea of breaking away from the past, have an impact on staff members who are expected to propel change and transformation. The same staff members are subjected to and confronted with the complexity of change where they have to deal with uncertainty, increased workload and lack of consultation. Appelbaum et al. (2000) highlighted that mergers and acquisitions have a negative impact on the economic performance of the organisations. Even if there could be a plan in process, mergers lead to poor results because the 'people issue' is ignored.

Botha (2001: 276) comments that one of the problems identified in a mergers process is "people issues" which she regards as the most important issue in merging, but it is ignored. There were other researchers (Hay, Fourie and Hay 2001; Mapesela and Hay 2005; Cartwright and Cooper 1992; Valpola 2001; Vaara 1999; Wyngaard and Kapp 2004) who agreed with Botha, even though some were not from a higher education fraternity. They feel that the human factor is important. If the human factor is ignored during the planning of mergers, institutions are faced with many uncertainties. These researchers feel that there is a vacuum if the issue of personnel is left out when merging processes are discussed.

In most organisations, not only in higher education institutions, mergers occur when the environment was not stable. When mergers occur, there is still a gap of unfinished jobs which was not dealt with before and brought to a closure. When two organisations merge, staff members feel that they are losing control over important aspects of their lives such as personal control, identity, culture and frames. Instead of staff trying to gain control, they withdraw. The withdrawal creates stress within an individual which leads to poor performance and job dissatisfaction (Appelbaum et al., 2000).

The ILO report (2001:27) and Shin (2003) indicate that in neglecting the human factor it becomes a frequent cause of failure in mergers. Cultural clashes cause distinction between the merging institutions, thus leading to an "us" versus "them" dualism. This dualism approach does not create a formal communication mechanism.

Hay, Fourie and Hay (2001:102) mentioned that institutional combinations are a thorny issue which implies downsizing of staff which is accompanied by various types of institutional changes that require staff to make certain paradigm shifts. They emphasised that little research (if any) is conducted in South Africa on the psychological experiences of academic

staff in institutions which either have been merged or which are in the process of merging. This supports my earlier statement that there are studies conducted on emotional and psychological experiences of staff in merged organisations but not in higher education in South Africa. Broadbent (1997) as cited by Hay, Fourie and Hay (2001:103) mentioned that at the Catholic University in Australia, academics were affected by merging, either positively or negatively. The greater part was negative effects related to staff fearing they may lose their jobs as well as the financial impact.

Mergers had a different impact on different institutions because in some institutions some staff members were involved in the planning, whereas in other institutions only management was involved. This impacted negatively on staff as some feel that their involvement could have made a difference in the process but few were there to represent the whole. This caused a huge impact as it is where decisions were made and taken. For example, in one institution, some divisions were merged without informing staff working in that division. Staff heard about it from the press when they saw a post advertised. Staff were not involved or informed about the changes.

Change and uncertainty cause stress as it affects the psychological aspects, perception and judgement and interpersonal relationships. Stress is determined by personal subjective perception which should be identified. The overall effect of mergers on staff and management is the interruption that has occurred over which both parties have no control. When interruption occurs, uncertainty about the future emerges which leads to change in frames and cues, work relationships, family relationships and jobs. All these finally affect the performance of an individual as the mind is interrupted when concentration changes. Studies have highlighted that mergers led to destruction of psychological contracts. All these changes have impacts on individuals, performance from staff as individuals and collectively, and on institutional levels. The impacts of mergers in higher education will be discussed, based on individual-professional, departmental/unit and institutional levels (Wyngaard and Kapp 2004).

3.2 The impact of mergers on the individual

Individuals have been affected by mergers from different perspectives. Focus will be on the impacts of a merger on individuals from their perception, job uncertainty, identity, sense of loss, emotions and morals, families and stress. According to Wyngaard and Kapp (2004:196) the impacts of mergers on some staff meant the end of their careers, while to others it was a

case of survival and to others it was a wakeup call, the opening up of new possibilities with the potential for growth and new opportunities to rethink their roles and career paths.

3.2.1 The impact of mergers on staff perceptions

It is interesting to note that some staff perceptions were shaped by their own negative view on institutions, how one reacts, realises and accepts the reality of a changing environment. Staff perceptions in mergers have positive or negative effects (Hay, Fourie and Hay 2001). The positiveness is caused by what staff perceived the institution to be before the mergers. The staff members in higher education view mergers differently from different levels from professionalism, experiences, responsiveness and skills point of view. These levels are not linked to the growth of the institution but to individuals. Merging of institutions is tremendously affecting employee's work, their lives where job security, emotional turmoil, uncertainty and anxiety about the future are becoming high. These factors force new institutions to deal with human problems to ensure the success of the institutions for the future (Marks & Mirvis 1985; Napier 1989; Shin 2003). It is important therefore for the institutions to understand and manage staff attitudes and behaviour before it can impact negatively on staff psychological and emotional needs.

A number of researchers (Cartwright & Coopers 1992; De Wet 2004; Hay, Fourie and Hay 2001) have indicated that some of the effects of mergers are caused by staff perception. Staff members start to perceive each other based on their qualifications, gender, and reaction of the institution, respect, race and experience. The perception in mergers can have an effect which finally can make the performance become high or low because it creates uncertainty about the future. For example, in merged institutions, there are staff members who become survivors, who are left behind when some staff members resign or become ill because of depression caused by mergers. These survivors perceive the institution in a positive and negative way. Positively, staff perceive mergers as an opportunity to earn recognition from the institution. On a negative note, staff members cannot cope in a situation where they lost friends, colleagues and leadership. This perception affects performance as the survival syndrome grows and staff feel that institutions do not respect their loyalty, do not respect them. As a result performance will drop. The ILO report (2001) supported the above statement by mentioning that on issues of survivors, the one that remains behind in the institution after downsizing, retrenchment, retirement, feel they have lost their personal control over the future and there is expectation of differences in how they will handle things.

If staff feel they are not respected, they become less positive and attach valuable time of their job to other things such as gossip. Therefore this shows that human perception and reaction to mergers are important. How institutions, units or faculties redistribute resources is important. How institutions structure departments, how institutions retain their staff, how they compensate their staff, can make the performance become high or low. Staff members regard mergers as a growing learning curve, where sharing of knowledge, understanding of the situation and opportunities to climb the ladder are possibilities. Staff see mergers as an opportunity to construct meaning and attach meaning to the new environment. To some staff, mergers helped them to create a niche for themselves from which they make new contributions. Their frame and cues change where experience and competences are shared with other staff members. Some see mergers as a way to rethink their role in a bigger multi-campus operation. To some it becomes a testing time for their career path as workload increases because of new programmes, different students, and different structures.

Individual perception of fairness of mergers had an impact which affects staff's performance. For example, if one group of staff perceive fairness towards another group, they will also expect to be treated fairly. Perception of fairness may lead to change in staff's cognitive representations of merged institutions. Staff will feel lost and have inclusion identity to one group rather than "we" versus "they" and this will lead to a new favourable attitude in a new institution (Shin 2003; Wyngaard and Kapp 2004). Hall, Symes and Luescher (2004:27), indicated that staff of institutions, including academics that are either frustrated by an increased administrative workload, perceive the merger as an organizational managerial budgetary exercise rather than an academic one. To some, this means an end to their career, loss of jobs, while to others it is a case of survival. Some experience it as a wake-up call, as the opening of new possibilities with potential growth and new opportunities. For example, staff who regard their identity as being the only reference were challenged to change their attitudes and share with others. Individuals feel they have lost their identity, they feel they have been robbed of their sense of belonging. Talent is lost as some staff members resign or retire early; those who remain become resentful and angry. Staff feel also that they have lost their role model and knowledge (Cartwright and Cooper 1992). Most experience uncertainty about their positions in the new institution. Lots of staff, especially senior staff through retrenchment packages, leave remaining staff with insecure feelings.

3.2.2 The impact of mergers on job uncertainty

Uncertainty is an aversive state that arises due to lack of sufficient information. Job uncertainty is seen and linked to higher levels of employee stress; reduced job satisfaction and job commitment which finally increase the desire in staff to resign. Job uncertainty is tested by using personal control in relation between job uncertainty and emotional exhaustion throughout different stages of downsizing. Callan et al. (2003:3-4), mentioned five propositions in the model which are: (1) job uncertainty is negatively related to personal control, (2) personal control is negatively related to emotional exhaustion, (3) job uncertainty is positively related to emotional exhaustion, (4) the relationship between job uncertainty and emotional exhaustion is mediated by personal control, and (5) emotional exhaustion is negatively related to job satisfaction⁵.

Firstly, job uncertainty is related to personal control. In mergers, staff uncertainty is caused by changes that take place in institutions from within individuals to outside the individuals. If staff do not know and understand the nature and the effect of a merger upon their jobs, status and organisational structure, then staff will most of the time fail to deal with the changing environment. This means that, staff will lack personal control of the situation they find themselves in. This becomes a reflection of negative relationship between job uncertainty and personal control.

Secondly, personal control is related to emotional exhaustion. If staff have no control over stressful events their performance will be affected. Staff members are in control if they are able to cope with threatening, uncertain or aversive events. The prediction as mentioned by Callan et al. (2003) is that personal control is negatively related to emotional exhaustion during downsizing.

Thirdly, job uncertainty is related to emotional exhaustion. Uncertainty is a stressful state itself. The inability to predict the environment creates uncertainty and reduces motivational force for individuals and group behaviour. A number of authors have emphasised that the change in environment caused the psychological discomfort which is associated with uncertainty, for example, Miller and Monger (1985), quoted by Callan et al. (2003:3), indicate that uncertainty is related to anxiety. Schweiger and Denis (1991), cited by Callan et al. (2003:3), found that uncertainty had a moderate correlation with stress. Ashford (1988), cited by Callan et al. (2003:3), found that the relationship between uncertainties measures the

⁵ <http://www.handels.gu.se/ifsam/Streams/oth/40%20final.pdf>

tiredness, depression and nervousness. These findings indicate that job uncertainty is positively related to emotional exhaustion.

Fourthly, the relationship between uncertainty and emotional exhaustion is mediated by personal control. There is still a lack of information on how control has a negative impact on workplace stress. It is a prediction that job uncertainty threatens people's sense of control over their action. When one lacks personal control he/she becomes stressed and performance is affected.

Finally, emotional exhaustion is negatively related to job satisfaction. From individual level the impact of mergers reduces the psychological well-being of some employees. This makes personal control (Callan et al. 2003) not to be related to emotional exhaustion but job uncertainty become related to stress measures, which have an effect on survival and emotional health.

On a negative level, the effect of a merger creates lack of personal control which is related to emotional exhaustion. The lack of personal control has an impact on organisational performance and in the long run has an effect on psychological and mental health of an individual, which, in turn, has a negative long term implication. Some individuals regard mergers as an issue of power, where those in authority just impose those issues on staff. Staff members feel that there is a lack of information coming through from management of institutions which increases anxiety, which finally leads senior staff to early resignations or voluntary retrenchment. Those who survive have "survival syndrome" where they become obsessed, and want to maintain their existing personal status. Valpola (2001) indicates that employee reactions to change are the principal factor why most mergers and acquisitions ultimately prove to be financially disappointing.

3.2.3 The impact of mergers on identity

According to Weick (1995) sensemaking begins with an individual as a sense maker, whose task is to establish and maintain an identity. Weick (1995:18) used this phrase "How can I know that I think until I hear what I say?" This shows that identity is the core preoccupation in sensemaking which is defined in the process action and interaction. Individuals find themselves in an ongoing process where they expose their self or to decide which face to put on. Individuals are in a process of undergoing a continual redefinition, coincident with presenting some self to others and trying to decide which self is appropriate. To be able to make sense, one has to react to what is going on. To be able to construct meaning, one learns

about identities by projecting them into the environment, and observes the results, as people shape and react to the environment.

For one to make sense, one has to reflect back and use the experiences acquired in the past to draw conclusions. The more self one has access to, the more meaning is extracted and imposed in any situation. Weick (1995) highlighted that sense is in the eye of the beholder- this is when people make sense about what is happening to them, where they are involved. In an organisation an individual is in a changing self stage which involves self-enhancement and self-consistency (Weick, 1995:20). In self-enhancement an individual tries to seek and maintain a positive cognitive and affective state about the self in self-efficiency, the self-desire to perceive one-self as competent, effective and, in self-consistency, the self-desire to sense and experience coherence and continuity.

Nathan (2004:183) supported Weick (1995) on the theory that identity construction is the basis for imparting meaning to information inside of organisations, and, eventually, determining which problems must be solved. Individuals expose the self to determine who to be or which face to put on and make sense with references of others. Vaara (2003:863) indicated that figuring out what is going on and what should be done is based on who the sense maker is and what his or her background is. This basically means that an individual makes sense based on what she/he has been experiencing. As individuals reconstruct identity, they also construct what is outside them.

There are negative expectations that emanate from stereotypes of staff that cause anxiety and tension during the interruption processes. The stereotypes are more visible where the issue of gender and race are causing lower performance or uncertainty. The identity has a high degree of conflict between groups which tend to result in feelings of hostility and anxiety. Due to the nature of the mergers that occur in HEIs, collective identity, social and organisational identities are usually more salient than personal identity (Shin 2003). In merged institutions the “I” identity does not exist as individuals hold a collective identity that makes one more concerned about losing their identity. The issue of social process which is re-categorisation of “us” versus “them” may minimise the inter-group cognition. This is supported by Weick (1995) who gave an allegory of fire fighters who refused to drop their tools because they identified their selves with the tools. If staff fail to maintain a stable self-concept of social identity, it will have a negative impact on staff performance and lower their commitment to the newly merged institution (Shin 2003; Weick 1995).

Individuals have collective sense through which they interact to determine the pattern of multiple experiences through direct influence of personal and collective experience. Cause-effects exist in institutions that merged where they are known by a limited group of people, for example, either men or women, where in most cases men are in management. These cause-effects separate the relationship over time and space in chains that are difficult to fully understand. For the individual to move from knowable to known is questionable as the issue of identity is not well addressed.

Change causes uncertainty, which affects individuals. If staff do not know what is going on in the nature and consequences of the changes upon their jobs, status and structure are, they feel ill informed to deal with the situation - in other words staff lack personal control of the situation. Changes, for example in mergers, bring downsizing and restructuring, which lead to job uncertainty and is related to a decrease in personal control (Appelbaum, et al. 2000).

Hay, Fourie and Hay (2001) mentioned that even if the people issue is discussed, little has been researched on staff psychological experiences. Hay, Fourie and Hay (2001:129) mentioned two factors that are related to the impact of mergers on staff, namely: A high level of insecurity is experienced and fear of retrenchment is dominant in the minds of staff. These create a vacuum that need to be researched from a psychological point of view. When staff members lose control, a sense of loss increases, as individuals face denial, disbelief, anger, rage and resentment. Emotional bargaining and depression which lead to unproductive performance increase. This is caused by the ways in which news of mergers is announced to staff members in different institutions.

3.2.4 The impact of mergers on communication

The announcement about mergers of HEIs in South Africa was made differently according to the levels of communication in particular institutions. Communication is seen as an internal arrangement which in most cases is initiated and conducted by the institution's management. It was surprising how some staff members heard about the mergers of their own institutions. Wyngaard and Kapp (2004:191) mentioned that the news of mergers was announced to staff members in different ways. Some staff members read about it in the press; some heard about it on television. The Minister of Education announced the merger in memorandums, e-mails, newsletters and circulars. All these confirm that the issue of mergers was communicated to staff differently. But the procedures or channels of communication used were not effective as expected, as it had an impact of staff. This statement is also supported by the ILO report

(2001) where it is stated that employees complained that their first knowledge of merging was hearing about it on the morning news. To some it was announced through internal magazines of institutions, some of it was through e-mails, memorandums were circulated, newsletters and circulars were published.

Communication was done wrongly whereby there was no guarantee that all institutions community were informed. The wrong information was wrongly circulated to staff at the wrong time. The way it was done ended up having some effect on staff. The right information was not communicated to the right people at the right time. It is mentioned several times that higher education mergers were developed by the democratically elected Government of South Africa after 1994. This necessitates effective communication to all staff in organisations to avoid uncertainty and confusion.

Lack of communication about integration plans created a sense of loss. Institutions reacted to mergers differently, and approached mergers differently. Each institution had a long history of its own, and there was a great sense of loss when they merged. Institutions lost the way they communicate their identity and their culture. It became a cultural shock for both. It became difficult to handle as there were no plans in place to handle human reactions as to how merging was going to work. It was not clear who would take leadership roles.

In this research the purpose is to look at and take cognisance of the diverse needs of institutions, as well as how merging affects staff regarding job satisfaction and performance. Job uncertainty leads to a sense of loss, staff members feel uncertain, they lose personal control and their emotions are affected.

3.2.5 The impact of mergers on sense of loss

When mergers occur, there are some changes that end up affecting the individual sense of belonging. As the institution becomes complex and diversity occurs, uncertainty prevails. Firstly, anti-trust develops as staff feel they have been betrayed and robbed of their culture, tradition and institution. The second effect is poor performance, which has been caused by the integration of technology, staff, programmes, technology and the institution itself. Most of the expertise is lost because of the disruption of employee culture. Staff who are less qualified feel threatened by the mergers as they see themselves being retrenched when new programmes and new teaching methods emerge, they regard themselves as not having skills to do the job. Even the qualified staff members regard the younger members as being safe as they regard them to be more knowledgeable with technology and new programmes. There are

some effects of mergers that challenge the institution, such as name changes, mission, vision, ownership and the control of the institution, financial implications, logo, organisational structure, and management change, style of work, managerial style, systems, policies and procedures (Cartwright and Cooper 1992). In a merged institution when one's sense of belonging is affected, one becomes lost and emotions and morale are affected. Loss of managerial focus during the transition also has a detrimental effect on staff. Service deliverance is also affected (Fulop 2002).

3.2.6 The impact of mergers on emotions and morale

Staff emotions in terms of mergers are positive and negative. Some staff emotions become more negative, very low and devastating as they regard mergers as an interruption that has robbed them of their career, identity and self.

According to psychology, it is accepted and known that the first level of response to any change in environment is emotional. These emotions have an impact on the behaviour of a person. Emotions can be seen as the 'discrete emotion perspective'. This proposes that emotions can be conceptualised as a set of discrete and phenomenological distinct affective states. Emotions can be pleasant and unpleasant according to the degree of simulations along an activation dimension from un-aroused to aroused and active. From a psychological perspective, emotions are classified into three underlying dimensions, which are pleasure, arousal and dominance. Pleasure is when a person feels happy or satisfied. Arousal concerns the degree of stimulation caused by an atmosphere, whereas dominance indicates the degree to which a person feels in control of a situation and feels to have influence over the surroundings and others. Arousal can either be negative or positive. It is positive if it is low and negative if there is tension (Breneman and Geuens 2003). Focus here will be on pleasure and arousal as both affect staff atmosphere where staff feel dissatisfied because of the changing environment caused by a merger.

Wyngaard and Kapp (2004:192) indicate that feelings and attitudes are mostly negative during mergers. This is exaggerated by gossip and rumours among staff, which lead to feelings of insecurity, which causes immediate job-hunting. Staff start to resist change, they become bitter and stressed because the atmosphere has changed. Some of the respondents in the Wyngaard and Kapp (2004) research, viewed mergers as something that does not respect traditions.

Too much arousal can be experienced as this creates unpleasant tension in staff. Even though the morale was low all the time, the merger process has intensified it. There will still be constant conflicts that occur when staff feel that they are treated unfairly in terms of salaries, and promotions, and trade unions end up intervening to secure the environment. Lack of loyalty, as staff do not want to do extra jobs, will exist as staff members feel what is there for me, if the institution does not recognise me as a person. Staff feel betrayed and they resent the fact that they merged and had not been consulted; again, there is no uniformity on morale in the institution. Alas and Vadi (2004) indicated that staff attitudes are considered as an indication of the future success of an organisation. Cooper and Croyle (1984) supported Alas and Vadi that a person's attitude influences a person's action in a certain way. If staff feel that there is insufficient support from the institution, job dissatisfaction will increase. This is observed through staff attitudes towards their work. The psychological and physical well-being of staff are affected by mergers which finally affect the performance of an individual.

The symptoms of excessive stress include irritability, low performance, irrationality, negative thought and increased autonomic arousal. These symptoms can be measured by heart rate increase where breathing becomes heavier and the adrenaline is pumping through the body. This is known as stress response to "fight or flight" which is complex (Botha, 2001:276). The above statement is supported by Galosy (1990:90) and Wyngaard and Kapp (2004:196). The impact of mergers on staff emotions could be observed by staff being traumatic, disruptive, distressed, painful, uncertain, loss in commitment, dampening in work motivation, shock, anger, disbelief, depression, demoralised anxiety, disappointment, disillusion, withdrawal, low morale, emotional exhaustion, loss, betrayal, turmoil, confusion, low morale, low productivity, absenteeism, emotional draining experiences, which lead to serious reassessment of self-worth and priorities.

Mergers are intrinsically stressful because of the changes occurring. What makes staff anxious in mergers is the perceived decline in the organisations. This is reinforced by gossip and rumours among staff. Uncertainty prevails, based on what the culture of the new institution will be. Emotionally, staff members are affected on a personal level because the workload increases due to resignations, retrenchment and voluntary packages. Staff members reassess themselves in terms of putting their energy where they will gain returns and feel valuable, staff prioritises their work, they focus more on themselves and their careers than on the institution because they feel the institution is not doing anything for them (Wyngaard and Kapp 2004:192).

To an individual the loss of identity or culture is personal and to some it is bereavement. On staff morality, the general trend is negative, very low and devastating, but to some staff it is a potential opportunity for growth. Though the morale was low before mergers, the situation has been intensified by the announcement of mergers. This led to constant conflict and lack of loyalty. According to Wyngaard and Kapp (2004:194) staff members were grouped into three categories: those who are despondent and miserable; those who are nasty and looking for a scapegoat and who could be described as always complaining, attacking; and finally the starry-eyed who are cautious and keep their head among all the turmoil, hoping for the best and working towards the better future.

One of the responses from the Wyngaard and Kapp (2004:194-196) research indicated that his focus is on the career, unlike before, where his focus was on the organisation. Another respondent indicated that “I had to create a niche for myself from which I can make a meaningful contribution” (Wyngaard and Kapp 2004:194-196). This is an indication of how staff reflect on the whole spectrum of mergers and how it impacts on their emotions. Some staff members were positive because they saw mergers as an opportunity to learn to renegotiate new meanings and as a learning opportunity. According to Wyngaard and Kapp (2004), emotional implications are that when mergers do not respect tradition or identity, the impact becomes unbearable to staff.

The most depressing impact on an individual is lack of self-confidence and self-worth. Staff members become cynical, some experience grief, a loss of something, become depressed as they see their identity die, their family being affected by working long hours, not being recognised by the institution in terms of work done, no compensation. Some staff indicated that they suspect they are chronically depressed because they have feelings of such a great despair on some days where they can barely operate (Wyngaard and Kapp 2004:196). Mirvis (1985) indicates that individuals face denial and disbelief; they become angry, feel rage and become resentful. Staff that survive or remain when others resign, become resentful and angry as they feel they have lost their influential role model to the less experienced.

Organisations learn through individuals who act as agents for them. As most individuals learn in different ways it is important to develop a group or a team to make it easy to learn. These differences are caused by mergers where history, culture, size and age of institutions integrate. Even if there are integrations, there are barriers which are caused by the complexity of the environment where there is fear of taking risk. Alas and Vadi (2004) stated that in a stable environment it is safe to be completely task oriented, but in a turbulent environment

with high interdependence, relationships need to be valued in order to achieve the level of trust and communication that will make the working situation conducive to a positive environment/workplace. Similar situations happen in merged higher education institutions where the environment is unstable and warm interpersonal relationships are needed to be able to perform. Individuals feel that their career paths came to an end.

In merged institutions, the importance of groups is that one needs to develop a sense of common identity when one looks at other members for emotional support and confirmation of meaning constructed to the events. Individuals depend on each other for emotional support and for making sense of their world and to increase their commitment. This does not only focus on cultural aspects but also on staff performance as both depend on each other. It is through interaction that staff will feel safe among each other to realise that one has to accept reality and contribute to the shaping of the new institutions. To some, a merger is about power, differing perception, culture and definition of the institution. How an individual perceives mergers, depends on Weick's (1995) levels of sensemaking which will be discussed in chapter three.

On a positive note, to some individuals merging is a learning opportunity where one creates a niche from which meaning can be constructed. To others it is an additional double workload. On a negative note, to the majority, the impact is expressed as intense emotions such as demotivation where staff start to feel like outsiders (Wyngaard and Kapp 2004).

3.2.7 The impact of mergers on stress

When staff learn about the potential of mergers, a tremendous amount of stress is introduced into the system. There are factors in mergers that create stress such as conditions in the workplace, financial hardship, job insecurity, workplace frustration that can cause job related stress, loss of identity, obsession with self-survival which finally will affect performance. Job related stress may lead to physical and mental illness if it is not well controlled. Stress can impact negatively and can cost the institution lots of money. When staff members are stressed, signs such as absenteeism, loss of concentration, anger, frustration and headache are observed, if not treated well. When staff suppress their anger and mistrust, their negative feelings trigger reactions ranging from generalised stress to demoralisation, depression and burnout, these in turn lead to poor performance (Callan et al., 2003). As the ILO report (2001:80) emphasises, stress related to job security makes staff feel pressured into agreeing to put extra effort into their jobs to demonstrate organisational loyalty. Such kind of loyalty is

not healthy to one's health as the working conditions become stressful. Merger impact on staff causes stress. Mergers generate a high level of staff anxiety and stress where the working environment changes, jobs come under threat, professional competence is affected.

Weick (1995:101) defines stress as an interruption that signals an emergency and draws attention to events in the environment. This interruption is a sign that can improve or make the event worse. Autonomic activity alerts people to the existence of threatening events, if the threat is not dealt with, it will cause stress. The ILO report (2001) indicates that managers are also stressed in merged organisations as they suffer from 'survivor syndrome' by failing to recognise and respond to it in productive ways. Survivors at work also are stressed as they have to work harder. Their jobs are threatened and their career prospects and professional competencies are questioned.

Staff from other institutions are aware that there are duplication of positions that need to be eliminated and the struggle to survive will be fierce. This ends up where staff involve trade unions to assist and it creates hatred among staff. Stress increases a person's vigilance which is determined by the emotions and degree of change involved. At a time when leadership and management have to solve uncertainty of staff, stress and uncertainties associated with mergers cause an inward focus and effect on them. Leaders have to articulate a vision, guide the entire institution. The effect of mergers as Cartwright and Cooper (1992) put it, depends on how employees react to change as people expect changes and try to find solutions to what the changes will be. No one in a merger situation goes untouched. A merger is a stressful process where staff give up many tasks that they identify themselves with. Staff become obsessed as they think of their status, their possible way to secure employment. The most hurtful thing is when staff become involved in back stabbing. It is not only mergers that make employees stressful, it is the anxiety caused by uncertainty (ILO report, 2001).

Change and uncertainty cause stress as it affects the psychological aspects, perception and judgement and interpersonal relationships. Stress is determined by personal subjective perception which should be identified. The overall effect of mergers on staff and management is the interruption that has occurred over which both have no control. When interruption occurs, uncertainty about the future emerges which leads to change in frames and cues, work relationships, family relationships and jobs. All these factors, finally affect the performance of an individual as the mind is interrupted where concentration changes. Studies have highlighted that mergers led to destruction of psychological contracts. All these changes had

an impact on individual performance from staff as collective individuals up to institutional levels.

If a merger process is not well handled, it can result in retrenchment and unplanned job rotation. Individuals may feel unable to fit into the new organisational structure and they can experience a high level of stress.

From a sensemaking perspective, Weick (1995) indicates in his seven properties of sensemaking that focuses on retrospect which analyses meaningful experiences to learn things about the current situations, which exist in the form of distinct events. It is because of the experience that meaning should be created, but because of unstable environment confusion emerge.

When institutional goals change, new meaning is created. These occur when institutional environments change, the meaning that was attached to the institution will change. These changes make retrospective sensemaking an activity in which many possible meanings may need to be synthesized (Weick 1995). The statement “If I have known, or had I known” shows that people only know what they are doing after they have done it before. There is action that takes place and thereafter a meaning is constructed. Singlestory and Howard (2002) said to learn what I think; I look back to what I said earlier. This means that whatever is happening has been influenced by what has already happened. Anything that affects remembering will affect the sense that is made of these memories.

3.3 The impact of mergers on departmental /divisional levels

The ways staff members are affected differ according to the department they work in. There is a negative impact on staff if the senior person or dean in the department does not show signs of commitment and companionship to staff during the merger. Staff need someone who can be close to them during the merger. Staff need someone who will show a sense of honesty and integrity, someone who will say what he/she knows and admit to what he/she does not know. Staff need someone who shows empathy, who can listen to them when they want to share the frustration of the merger.

3.3.1 The impact of mergers on resistance to change

The resistance to change is often the result of fear of negative impacts. Change is easy; inner adaptation is not. Throughout the merger processes, the VUWC staff indicated a low resistance to change. The reason is that the VUWC had to move from a totally different type of culture to the forced merger in corporate type of culture. Due to this fact they resisted

change. The resistance was measured by poor attendance of meetings when staff were invited to listen and make contributions. The other impact that occurred is lack of trust, when processes of salary negotiation took too long, staff started to doubt the accountability and responsibility of the new management.

When complexity occurred it extended the transitional phase by eight months, which caused staff to lose hope and trust. Although staff members were unhappy with the process, they still have hope in the vision of a merger (De Wet 2004).

3.3.2 The impact of mergers on positions and departmental units

To those with qualifications it is time to think and measure oneself in terms of peers with the same qualifications. It is through mergers that staff responsibilities change, where staff have to reshape themselves in some of the units that run without leadership (Wyngaard and Kapp 2004). The workload increases without training, initiative plays a major role. This varies from department to department. In some departments, it led to staff losing their jobs, some positions merged. Some staff saw an opportunity to gain experience and skills. This also depends on the efficiency of the division. Some members in departments feel a loss of their leadership because those who were not doing their jobs were exposed. This occasionally depends on an individual sense of ownership and responsibilities.

The departments/ schools experience changes because styles and methods of teaching have changed. Institutions talk and use technology such as Web-CTs and IPODs in teaching, which save space and time. This will have an impact on staff members because in their days of training, technology was not available. Now the effect is that most of the time, staff are attending development courses instead of being in the lecture rooms with students. This has also an impact on students as most of the time lecturers had to acquire skills to be able to perform. Staff, who are experienced in technology more especially the young staff, become more comfortable while the less experienced older staff saw it as a threat to their career.

Some staff felt that a merger never affected them because their department was efficient. Some indicated that the mergers have created a great challenge to the leadership to maintain order and not to compromise standards in the wake of serious negativity and uncertainty. Some feel they have lost leadership positions and they have lost trust to leadership. Some view mergers as a concept that has affected a change of experience in leadership (Wyngaard and Kapp, 2004:195).

3.3.3 The impact of mergers on re-curriculation and new programmes

The development of mergers in HEIs heralded a huge change in the nature of professional education as two different academic institutions merged. Because of the mergers, the original identity of the organisations and institutions was lost. The creation of new names for institutions and the creation of new courses or programmes change the whole institutional identity. With increasing use of technology, teaching is affected (Wilson 2000). From an academic side, the issue of re-curriculation and new programmes has an impact on staff and students. Staff members start to question the fidelity logic assumed to exist between creations of new programmes which led to lack of trust, confusion, and transparency to management. As Mfusi (2004) puts it according to goals set by the National Plan of Higher Education (Department of Education 2001:2), purports that 'the National Plan provides a unique opportunity to establish a higher education system that can meet the challenges and grasp the opportunities where in the meantime staff members are faced with the idea of producing graduates with high quality skills and competencies in all fields'. This means that to achieve this, new curricula should be in place to suit and satisfy the goal set by NPHE (Mfusi 2004).

To academic staff, the introduction of new programmes becomes a concern. It becomes difficult for lecturers to teach something totally new, their frames change and they are expected to perform. This has an influence on the curriculum issue of mergers as some programmes have to shift from one faculty to another. It becomes difficult for staff to cope with a new way of doing things. This led staff to be less interested in preparation; the lack of enthusiasm by staff indicated that planning of mergers need to be recognised and that curriculum issues are not only about educational content, but also about staff status, identity and self-image, which is an academic concern (Mfusi 2004). There is no commitment to the curriculum from staff, as to them incorporation is just a mess. Academics across different levels in an institution are affected by a merger: some staff fear they will loose their jobs, some regard mergers as the cause to end their career path and everything they have worked for. Feelings of frustration and anxiety, loss, symptoms of depression, loss of commitment, demoralisation and an unwillingness to do anything beyond the required minimum, emerge (Hay, Fourie and Hay 2001:103).

This resulted in staff resigning and re-applying for new positions and new jobs outside the institution. According to Alas and Vadi (2004), most of the staff resign because they do not feel needed, and because they could not make decisions as the hierarchical structures had to change. Some feel mergers will not accommodate them because of their lack of experience. It

is interesting to note that the perception of some staff members shapes their own negative view of the institution. Change of frames affects staff performance because they distract from their core function. The impact of mergers on staff affects the departments, where some lecture classes have to move to other institutions. The impact of merging on departments has a positive effect on departments that are efficient in their work rather than those who are inefficient. Mergers challenge deans is to see to it that their faculties deliver. It is difficult to loose some of the leaders in terms of avoiding duplication (Wyngaard and Kapp 2004).

Staff members are affected by mergers as they do not trust the management of the institution. Some view mergers as a time consuming and uncertain process as it creates a lot of absenteeism and emotional exhaustion. Alas and Vadi (2004) highlighted that employees' attitudes are considered as an indicator of future success of an organisation. Staff attitudes such as behaviour, values, motivation and commitment are influenced by a person's acts.

The crux of merging is to enhance institutional capacity to produce quality education. This exposed staff to a changing environment and a new institutional culture, which ended up affecting staff performance. A new identity for the new organisation is created. Staff and management need to share information in time. If not, staff will develop a feeling of mistrust, loss of control, betrayal, bitterness and tension. As staff suppress their anger and mistrust, their negative feelings trigger reactions ranging from generalised stress to demoralisation, depression and burnout, which lead to autonomic arousal. When staff are faced with a situation where they do not know what is happening in terms of their jobs, they become stressed, which accumulates in breakdown and a low morale (Applebaum et al., 2000; ILO report 2001).

3.4 The impact of the mergers on institutional level

The issue of a time factor from the Ministry of Education where institutions were given a limited time to complete the processes had an effect on the performance of the institutions. The first group to merge was to commence in January 2004, with the second group in January 2005. In spite of many challenges facing HEIs, the financial and legal aspects were completed, except for the human factor which is a crucial one. The situation became more difficult for the institution to handle. Focus will be on the impact or effect of mergers on institutional level based on departmental unit, re-curriculation, and job security, lack of trust and distance impact.

Management of institutions lose their innovative control and autonomy because of mergers. Power and prestige change from top management. Physical and emotional problems emerge as some cannot make decisions as their levels and positions have changed (Siehl 1990). Tension and distrust grow. Unlike the individual level where cognitive factors and human factors played a role, here a multitude of different research disciplines contributed, such as organisation, psychology and management. Researchers have indicated that in some mergers that took place, leaders of organisations have started their adaptation to the new reality long before the merger was announced.

Most leaders should have ridden the wave and must be way in front of this shock wave now crashing down on others. Most leaders wonder why staff members do not get it and often they mistake shock and confusion as resistance to the new realities. Institutions are faced with problems such as staff that resist change, lower levels of commitment to the institutions, low morale of staff, and a high rate of staff resigning. These factors will keep the institution from reaching their goals. Mergers have tremendous changes that impact on staff as well as on the institutions (Shin 2003). When the institution merges, there is some unhappiness going on which are related to structure, individual norms, behaviour and attitude. People are happy to be identified with the institution they served for decades, where they have developed a sense of ownership and belonging. Culture plays a major role in institutions.

Merging two institutions with different academic backgrounds creates a cultural clash which leads to uncertainty, stress and fear of losing students and staff. Institutional change can be viewed in different ways. For example, in some institutions the sense of hierarchy is much greater than in other institutions. This hierarchy will be affected by the merger and it will change from top to bottom where all staff at all levels expect directions from their managers. This can paralyse the institution as the entire staff rely on managers or management to give answers to everything.

When two different institutions merge and form a new institution, each has its own internal work environment, ethics and internal way of doing things. This creates tension where the question of “whose approach is the right approach” for the merged entity is raised. Institutions fail to answer this question and fail to recognise the staff concerns. The other factor that has an impact on institutions is that, during the mergers, the new structure and new allocation of decision making take place, where some staff will win and some will lose. This creates a gap of uncertainty between the winner and the loser. Resistance builds up between the two institutions, where there is a sense of ambiguity about what rules to follow and

politics start to take place. Manjoo (2002) agrees with the above statement, that merging two institutions creates a lot of uncertainty as organizations have expectations regarding cost cuts and there are cultural clashes as the way of doing things by merged organizations differ. There is also an expectation about career progress which creates uncertainty. A lot of tension arises regarding whose approach is the right approach for the merged entity.

New structures and new allocation of decision rights cause uncertainty, resistance builds up to change. For example, at the then TFS and the then VUWC, they had different programmes serving different communities. The VUWC was previously a black institution which served most of the blacks, while the TFS was in an urban area serving a majority of white community. Mergers are seen as management hubris. Staff members start applying for new jobs, as they have lost trust in the organisational culture and feel that the merger will not accommodate them. What is less apparent is the pervasive loss of productivity and performance of those who remain. Managers here suffer from their own strain of “survivor’s syndrome”. Morale of staff becomes affected as communication and information is not passed to staff at grass root level. Morale is predominantly negative which leads to poor attitude, staff resignations, uncertainty, lowering of loyalty, accountability and performance. This aspect shows that the merger was not properly discussed with the entire institution community (Claud 2000).

A sense of “I have won” takes place and leads to a negative working environment. All of this causes tension, uncertainty and dislocation in an institution, which leads to poor staff performance. According to Mook (2000) mergers can provide an opportunity to take the strength of both organisations and blend them into a new entity. Looking at the clash of culture as mentioned before, both institutions existed for decades, where each is comfortable with their institutional culture. To change the names and departments, management has to look at their strengths that have been their strong points. These points must be maintained and some adaptation to realities of change and transition must be done. Yes, there will be some commonality and differences which, over a period of time, will be fine, as staff, through interactions in working together and working through common goals, staff will find a culture that will suit all of them.

Interaction is not simple as the group is referring to different backgrounds. For example, for the two institutions, TFS and VUWC, to merge, it is not easy for staff to drop their background, which Weick referred to as “drop the tools”, and move on and accept the new one. This level normally has negative impact since what is discussed, needs to be

implemented by the entire institution as social interaction results in a stressful situation. Interaction on this level plays a major role.

In all institutions and organisations, communication in a merger is essential for a smooth transition of power. Frequent communication through multiple avenues such as printed documents, e-mails and meetings is necessary. Lack of communication between management and staff causes stress as staff do not know anything about decisions made by management in time of stress. The “noise” of survival and uncertainty drowns out the message. Communication prevents conflict and rumours in institutions. Though, we should not forget that communication often requires translation as well as adaptation. Institutions have to come together and look into the strategy needs that will reach all staff from both campuses. If there is a vacuum in communication people will fill the vacuum with rumours (Mook 2000).

Regarding the impact of a merger on curricula, the effect is when some programmes have to be phased out from one campus to avoid duplication. Some programmes are moved from one faculty to the other, some are consolidated and a new programme emerges. This does not have much of a negative effect as the programme continues.

The impact of mergers is that one institution will lose its autonomy and become absorbed by the other one. In these instances, VUWC lost its autonomy to the CUT. The impact of the merger to the VUWC staff members was initially a positive one as staff members saw the opportunity of growth. When the merger process continued, staff from the VUWC developed fear from rumours that the institution’s financial state is not stable. To staff at the VUWC, what started as an opportunity ended up in frustrations. From institution, management, feel that staff members have been destructed by their negative thought which made them see merger as political motive exercise. This is why management of institution is resentful because mergers also affected the institutions as they saw and fear possibilities of losing competent and knowledge of the institution and seeing merger adding a new complexity in the workplace which affects social dialogue. For example, human resources become affected, finance department were affected because of error-filled pay salaries, channel of communicating or passing information is affected, for example sending e-mail to all staff instead of staff that the information will have meaning to them, such as sending e-mail of submission of exams results to all support and academic staff. These create ignorance to the entire staff, as staff end up not reading e-mails with subject “all staff” as they regard them as “junk mail”

While the tension between the social structure level and the social interaction level is contradictory, it will have an impact if staff are involved or share decisions before an agreement is reached. Lack of space and time causes frustration to staff as they have to accept decisions taken on their behalf. When an inter-subjective level is applied on an institutional level, it will help to rectify things that were taken for granted by the institution which had an effect on staff performance. For example, if the Vice-Chancellor invites the management committee by using e-mail, such use as a tool provides a narrow communication channel capacity. What is needed is a public discourse support system that would enable both management committees on two campuses to get the message.

All of the above have an impact on staff performance because of high absenteeism, uncertainty-lower morale, job dissatisfaction, behaviour, sabotage and stress. These in the long run have an effect on the psychological and mental health of employees which in turn have a negative effect on the organisation.

When two institutions merge, the social identity processes will be prevalent. The institutions become an influential source of social identity because it is fundamentally linked to its social, economic and psychological well-being. In mergers, the visibility of the situation becomes high, and social identity becomes low because staff are uncertain about the turbulent environment (Shin 2003). When staff are unable to accurately predict the consequences of their choices, uncertainty arises as staff cannot differentiate between relevant and irrelevant information. If staff are dissatisfied within institutions, the only choice they have is to resign. If staff do not know what is happening in the institution regarding the changes that affect the job and job status, they become emotionally affected (Callan et al., 2003; Vaara 1999).

3.4.1 The impact of mergers on job security

Most individuals thought their title at the institution is a lifetime title, not anymore. In most instances, mergers lead to restructuring. Mergers may present a unique chance to get rid of individuals. This is caused by constant restructuring and redundancies that led to a culture of insecurities which is a key factor to negative work reactions. Organisations, including institutions, are restructuring, which make individuals feel insecure. There is an increase of casual or temporary jobs and outsourcing that causes insecurity to grow. Staff start to be concerned and worried about their competences and talents and how they will be valued in the new organisation. While staff members are worried, performance drops, cues and frames are affected. Staff members take their stressful work situation and transfer it to their homes

and families. How mergers impact on the individual is based on shared situation awareness in a common task environment and how situation awareness can be enhanced through sense making, how the cognitive level is affected in relation to race, gender, qualification.

The ILO report (2001:81) Australian survey indicated that staff attitudes in firms that downsized 72% reported diminished job security, 53% decreased organisational commitment; 50% a drop in motivation and 65% reduced staff morale. Most staff who fail to get full time jobs turned to part time jobs. In conclusion, Weick (1995) gave an allegory of “drop your tools” of the fire fighters of South Canyon in 1994. This is about 47 fire fighters who died within sight of safe areas. The main reason for their deaths was that they failed to drop their tools, especially the heavy tools they were carrying. By keeping their tools, with them they lost valuable distance they could have covered more quickly if the tools were lighter. The question is “why did the fire fighters keep their tools”?

When taking the above allegory to individuals and how the merger affected them, one could say that individuals take their job title and job security as identification of who they are. To them the merger does not make sense if their identity is lost. Because of individuals’ perceptions, Valpola (2001:77) indicated that the fire fighters, who are individuals in this study, fail to drop their tools because of:

-Listening: Individuals fail to hear what management of the institution says to them about the merger. This is caused by the fact that management did not give a clear reason why the merger occurred. Involvement of the planning committee was not well communicated.

-Justification: Lack of clear justification why change occurs, why it is important to drop the tools, why it is important to combine sections and report to one person, forgetting that individuals persist when they are given no clear reasons to change. Lack of justification affects the performance of persons.

- Lack of trust: when there is lack of trust in management of institutions, individuals feel betrayed and do not trust management who tells them to change or accept change. This is because management manages by screening around instead of managing by walking. Individuals feel no one explained to them the details of the merger especially the individuals from Welkom campus. One staff member said “We were left alone, hearing things from the grapevines. This shows the institution does not know what they are doing, how can we trust them with our jobs as they never called upon staff to explain details to them?”

-Control: A job is an individual's survival, is their bread and butter, so when interruption occurs, to some there is no other job, or any other source of income.

- Skills at dropping: Individuals resist change because they do not know what to expect. Fear of the unknown prevails. Valpola (2001:77) indicates that people may keep their tools because they do not know how to drop them. During time of stress, people regress to what they know best, which in this case of a merger is to stick to your job and be afraid of extra tasks allocated to a person. The value of their job is important.

-Failure: Individuals refuse to drop their tools because they do not know how to drop them. They want to be seen as failures.

-Consequences: As individual do not have trust, they do not know the facts of survival. Such opportunities arise.

-Identity: Individuals regard their jobs as their tools that give them recognition. If they drop their tools, who are they? A fool? The fusion of tools with identities means that under conditions of threat, it makes no more sense to drop one's tool than to drop one's pride. To them tools and identity form a unity without separable elements (Valpola 2001:78).

Staff members feel insecure in their employment as institutions are in a transformational, restructuring and downsizing stage. Individuals are affected differently by mergers as they see their gender, age and qualifications being ignored. Aspects that are more affected are power, differing perceptions, culture definition, emotion, identity, personal control and stressful life, sense of loss, change of cues less frames, family repercussion and diversity. Self and identity are crucial to make sense of the thoughts, feelings and behaviours of individuals and this interpersonal level is most often the province of psychologist. The construct self and identity are also important to explaining the formation, maintenance and dissolution of interpersonal bonds - both personal relationships and role relationships (Weick 1995; Valpola 2001).

3.4.2 The impact of mergers on trust

The trust that individuals have in management has been taken away. To be able to build trust, management must maintain integrity and openly communicate the vision of the merger with the entire staff. When mergers take place, individuals view it as betrayal. A low level of trust, on one hand, can have a significant impact on the merger such as low morale, high stress and deep depression. Trust in the workplace, on the other hand, helps to retain staff. Galosy (1990:90) said mergers forced employees to face loss such as hierarchical status, knowledge

of firms, procedures, people change, trusted subordinates where people are shifted around, job definition, friends and peers, control, network where new connections are formed. The cause of these uncertainties is that the staff feel they have little input into major changes that have affected them. In addition, employees can no longer look to the employer for job security as they lack trust. All these uncertainties create a sense of anxiety in human beings in the workplace. Fulop (2002) indicates that senior managers become remote to employees whereas senior managers themselves feel cut off from the services they are managing. Staff also feel that senior managers do not devote enough time to them. All these are the effect that emanate from the impact of a merger on trust. Fulop (2002) supports the statement above that on service delivery there is a loss of managerial focus, top management becomes remote, there is unresponsive and slow decision making. Management is not sure of the scope of their authority, which finally causes distrust to staff.

In a study on trust in the workplace, it was found that, on average, respondents trusted other people in their organizations. Of the four groups rated (peers, leaders, other teams, senior management), respondents were most likely to trust their leaders (average of 5.06 on a 7-point scale). Senior management was the least-trusted group (average of 4.51). The top five ranked trust-building behaviors were:

- Communicate with me openly and honestly, without distorting any information.
- Show confidence in my abilities by treating me as a skilled, competent associate.
- Keep promises and commitments.
- Listen to and value what I say, even though he or she might not agree.
- Cooperate with me and look for ways in which we can help each other (Bernthal 2005).

When a person is anxious, the creativity, ability to concentrate and tolerance to frustration is affected. Reaction of people who are anxious differ: some can withdraw and wait to be told what to do and it will affect performance, some can sabotage ideas, which often happens more that we think. Mergers do not only create a human loss but also an institutional loss. There is also a power struggle among staff at all levels of organisation, which consume a lot of time that could be used for productivity.

Galosy (1990:90) found that during mergers, all the energy was placed on evaluating staff, downsizing, technology and transferring, but what was nearly lost in all of this orchestrated

mayhem were the employees as human beings. While most of the human resources professionals worked around the clock processing huge and newly workforce, the human factor was ignored. A merger usually brings a great deal of change to staff perception. It is important for the institution to find a way of dealing with transition in individuals and the institution. Institutions must help staff to maintain a stable and constructive social identity and their self-concept, motivate staff by performing their roles, and communicate to staff. In this regard, institutions must try to focus their communication to “managing by walking” (Weick 1995). If institutions fail to deal with perceptions of staff effectively, it will then be difficult to develop a stable social identity because of dual identity.

Institutions such as the CUT are to ensure that quality permeates through all the levels of decision making, from the lecturing hall to administration. This factor remains a challenge to institutions to realise that the past histories of universities and technikons can no longer be an excuse of not performing (Mosia 2005). On the issue of the quality factor, time is the main factor in terms of completion. Mosia (2005) mentioned that the time that the Minister of Education allocated to institutions to perform the functions relating to the mergers of Higher Education was not enough. In anticipation of the complexities that accompanied these mergers, the legislator made provision in the act⁶ that the Minister may extend the period. Institutions were advised to complete the merger during an interim phase in six months. This led institutions to operate under pressure; where the human factor was ignored and staff perceived it that management does not care about them. Whereas time was of the essence, it was clear that there were many outstanding issues that were preferably left for the permanent council to complete or take forward. Many of these have to do with human resources issues. Walton (1974:12) supported the above statement by saying “if an organization fail to meet minimum employee expectations on each point, deep dissatisfaction will hamper the effectiveness.

3.4.3 The impact of mergers on the issue of distance

The issue of distance affect those who are less mobile, either because of low income or physical disability. Distance has a negative impact to staff in terms of adding tiredness and interruption in communication. The face to face communication is affected, even though technology is advanced, man to man conversation is still important, more especially when the merger is still in process. Distance encourages the growth of uncertainty, inferiority and

⁶ Higher Education Amendment Act 23 of 2001

information misunderstanding. Since higher education merger is a new phenomenon, the issue of distance between institutions has an impact on strategic thinking and financial implication. According to Hall, Symes & Luescher (2004:24-26), Australia did have little experience on mergers when Victoria College merged, where it became bureaucratic to manage multiple campuses. These have an effect on the structure of the institution.

The principals meeting of Victoria College management realised that there are functions that cannot be centralised. These functions had to be on each campus, for example, student's administration, day to day administration and the finance department. The two institutions had to reach consensus where they have to share the functions. It is for the institutions to share the new structure with staff to minimise anxieties. Distance affects performance and productivity as staff had to travel from one institution or organisation to another. Institutions that merge, find it hard to conduct meetings where management of both institutions have to agree on time and location. Service is also affected as there is a delay in service because of distance.

3.5 The effects of the mergers on staff performance

The overall impacts of the merger on the CUT will be discussed, based on the effects on staff performance. Before a merger came into the scene, the institution had some unfinished business which needed to be addressed, such as unfilled positions, poor communication, a highly regulated environment that the institution operated in. All these contributed to the negative effects of the merger on the CUT. Had the merger found the CUT being in a stable environment, maybe the effect of the merger could have been less or been approached from a different perspective. Appelbaum et al. (2000) mentioned that, when two organisations merge, employees feel that they will lose control over the important aspects of their lives such as personal control, identity, culture and frames. In stead of staff trying to gain control, they withdraw. The withdrawal created stress within an individual which leads to poor performance and job dissatisfaction. Finally individuals in institutions are affected differently by gender, age, qualification and race.

3.5.1 How female staff are affected compared to their male counterparts

Female and male staff are affected differently by the organisational events. Female staff perceive mergers from a different perspective, even among themselves as females. Some female staff individually feel mergers make sense to them as it brings together a sense of belonging. They see possibilities of promotion by the institutions more especially that

Government also preach women empowerment. Female staff see it as an opportunity for growth, to have positions in managerial posts. They feel secure as they will be doing fewer jobs of lower levels and be promoted in areas which were dominated by men which are higher levels. Females see mergers as a mixed blessing for higher status, better programmes emerging, shared resources and expertise. There are females who see mergers as a tool to lead them to a new beginning, new technology and new way.

In theory, mergers should provide staff with ideal opportunities to demonstrate their skills, commitment to best practices in areas of non-discrimination and equal opportunity. On management level women are sparsely represented. In most countries, even before mergers, companies were characterised by a predominantly female workforce in lower levels. Traditionally, it has shown that men still hold managerial decision-making positions whereas women occupy the majority of front offices. For example, in South African Higher Education structure, the majority of men are still in the fore front in the hierarchy of the institutions, with the exception of one institution. It has been viewed as diminutive that women only get positions when their skills and expertise are needed (Affirmative Action Program Report 1999).

As female employees are occupying lower levels which often form part of support services, they become the first victims of being fired. Females end up being handicapped compared to men regarding staff status and possibilities of career progression. Female are affected by mergers because they are not involved in the discussion and high committees of organisations and job specifications are more detrimental to women, given the fact that they are disproportionately represented in part-time work and are less visible in decision-making. Females become stressed as they feel their voices are not heard. At individual level, most women still lack the appropriate education, training and experiences to be retained in merged institutions when retrenchment occurs. There is a perception that women do not have the staff networks and personal contacts that enable them to compete for the remaining positions.

Vaara and Tierin (2001) support what The Affirmative Action Program Report (1995) indicated, that the Nordic societies are well known for high levels of female participation in the workforce. Yet, as this study reaffirms, this does not mean that women are likely to be present in the top echelons of management. Although everybody in the firm felt that at the level of 'formal justice', women had no barriers against their rise into senior positions, it was obvious that the reality of women's 'dual' lives at home and in the workplace, in a way that the men were not simultaneously present, militated against this.

In their desperation for the new company not to be seen as dominated by one nationality, functions and specialities were distributed across the four countries involved, rather than concentrated in a particular headquarter. The result is that managers were involved in a huge amount of travelling across different sites. The managers themselves recognized that this made them an 'absent presence' in their families. Women were rarely willing to participate in this process and are generally seen by men as unsuitable for it anyway. This theme of 'mobility' and how it relates to a work life balance is a very useful one to introduce into the analysis of cross-border mergers and acquisitions.

At social level, the responsibilities of women for family obligations also create a perception that women cannot be placed at managerial positions. The idea that women are homemakers and men are breadwinners is still strongly anchored in local culture. Men and women are affected differently even if women are in managerial positions. Females are more affected by mergers as it induces job losses for them rather than their male counterparts. This leads to job opportunities in top management to shrink, promotion become less and morale decline. Due to elimination of overlapping positions and avoiding duplication, females are the ones who are affected. Females see mergers as political motivated exercises and as possibilities of losing their jobs. Females see mergers as a stumbling block to job promotion, which will lead to redundancy. Female staff start to apply for new jobs outside the institution as they feel mergers will not accommodate them. This lowers the morale and females become negative and resigned and develop poor attitudes. The results of this are uncertainty, lowering of loyalty and accountability and performance.

Statistics of the University of Victoria indicated that women are less in senior appointment in academic levels than their male counterparts. This is indicated in pay equity, promotion, job security and reclassification in senior positions. The report stated that in higher education institutions, women in academics continue to be underrepresented in senior positions. Percentage wise, women in senior positions are far less compared to their male counterparts (Affirmative Action Program report 1999).

If we take statistics of female Vice-Chancellors at universities in South Africa, it is far less compared to their male counterparts. When Dr Mamphela Ramphele took the position as Vice-Chancellor at the University of Cape Town, she was faced with challenges to change the staff profile of the University, which was largely white and male dominated, and also to transform the institutional culture into one which is more inclusive and affirming of all

members of its community. With all the effort, vision and mission that Dr Ramphele experience has, she is still being attacked because she is a female.

This was supported by Van Dullemen conference report (1999) that women are still not trusted in higher positions. Van Dullemen gave a background when Dr Ramphele was appointed as a vice –president at the World Bank. She indicated that for Dr Ramphele to get the post that does not mean that the World Bank had changed. Van Dullemen (1999) in conclusion of the conference she said, Dr Ramphele was born in South Africa and went to university to become a medical doctor. Things changed when she accepted the position in the World Bank. By accepting the position, it suddenly created a lot of ambivalence. How she rose in politics and her position, was discussed. Issues about her identity, where she was born and what she had/have were mentioned. For her being the vice president of the most powerful institution in the world and been seen as a radical, left wing African woman sitting in the chair of vice president became the talk. This is an indication that no matter how hard females try to rise in high positions, the “pull her-down syndrome” will still exist. The question that arises is does that mean the World Bank has changed or will she just be used to give the bank that human face it is desperately seeking for such a long time?⁷ Ineke van Kessel supported Van Dullemen that Dr Ramphele made all the steps in the political process, she became a candidate and she got elected. Van Dullemen and Kessel wanted to stress the fact that women are oppressed.

From the above statement it is a reflection of how females are treated as compared to males counterpart. If Dr Ramphele was a male, her credibility will not be questioned. When women occupy a higher post, they are seen as just giving that particular institution the human face they are seeking.

Women are seen or identified by positions when they get managerial posts. In most of academic institutions, staff profiles indicated that the majority of women are clustered in lower positions. Though there are some institutions where the majority of women climb the ladder of professorship, the pace is very slow while the male counterpart is saturated in higher levels of professorship. To non-academic staff, the primary gender equity is women, which is also reflected on pay equity. To non-academic staff women, it is interesting as the number is rising all the time. What is disappointing is that the trends of few women at the senior non-academic staff levels remain low. Females are more represented at junior levels and progressively less in senior levels. The number of women is even rising in lower

⁷ Conference report, Leadership for the new Southern African Millenium. Women on the rise in politics.

positions compared to their male counterparts in the entire University. Women's status in January 2000 started to rise by 20% in senior positions such as directors and associate directors, compared to March 1998 when there were no women. The impact of job security on women continues to rise in higher education.

More women are employed on contract base than their male counterparts. In non-academic section, more women are on permanent jobs as full-time employment on lower levels compared to their male counterpart. Number of women on contract has fallen down on non-academic staff. On issues of salaries, gender disparities still exist even if the level of education and skills between male and female are the same and services are the same. This is reflected by the larger numbers of women in senior positions where they still occupy low levels. Gender salaries differentials remains. On the issue of promotion, academic side, it reflects that women have marginal promotion than men counterparts, while more women apply for promotion but they do not get the positions.

In conclusion, according to Affirmative Action Program Report (1999:1) the status of women in higher education is affected at the University of Victoria because:

- There are fewer women than men at senior posts both in academic and non-academic institutions
- Women continue to be disproportionately clustered at the lower end of the hierarchy.
- Fewer academic women than men hold continuing appointments
- Fewer women staff works on contract than their male counterpart -women are underrepresented in all higher levels of the institutions.
- Women continue to have less job security in academic sectors and women continue to be underrepresented in senior positions.

In Europe, according to the ILO report (2001), during the 1970's and early 1980's, there was growth and diversity in the financial sector. The impact of merging affected women's job titles. In management women are sparsely represented. Merging is still viewed as masculine traits. In financial sectors, females are in lower hierarchical levels in number of specific occupational categories. The distinction between men's and women's jobs has traditionally manifested itself by men holding the managerial positions whereas women occupy the majority of front and back office clerical jobs (ILO report 2001). Institutions must provide ideal opportunities to demonstrate their commitment to best practice in the area of non-

discrimination and equality of opportunities. Distinction of men all the time holding managerial and departmental posts let women feel left out in decision making of the institutions. In financial sectors females are predominately at a lower hierarchical level. The ILO report (2001:64) gave an example from Finland, where females are predominately at lower levels, whereas men hold managerial decision making positions. But the trend is now changing as females are now rising in percentage in high positions. This depends on job specifications and job mobility.

Mergers have affected more females than males, simply because in most cases in organisations and institutions when females and males have the same contracts of work, men enjoy more benefits than women, the contracts start to differ. This makes mergers gender insensitive. That is why most female priorities are home based rather than workplace based and they choose to work in a pattern and contract that reflect their priority (ILO report 2001). In all working environments whether it is financial sectors, education or government, females start at lower levels, all the time.

History has indicated that men were seen as tough, strong in decision making where it shows in society that masculinity is the dominating gender with a belief that organisations that have men on top, perform well. Research shows that Sweden is more of a feminine country while Great Britain is one of the most masculine societies.

According to Singh (1994) he studied the difference between male and female executive personality characteristics and work values in India. His findings were that females appear to be more interested in making money, involved in their work, more enthusiastic, more socially bold, more opinionated and lastly tenser. He mentioned that women appear to be more satisfied in performing well at their jobs that men did, whereas men were more interested in seeking higher level jobs, a better standard of living, more aware of social status, more emotionally stable, more assertive, more experiential, more socially precise and more autonomous. Men prefer to keep themselves more busy and active on the job.

Globally, statistics show that men have a stronger preference in organisations. The gender issue does not affect the institutional structure directly. At the CUT, the issue of gender had an affect on diversity of the institution. At the CUT, few women are professionally active in higher levels. There is a lack of gender diversity more especially in key positions of the institution. This, according to some respondent, became clear that there is still a perception that males have different personalities, work values and different management styles than

females. There is still a perception that institutions that are led by men are successful, as compared to the ones led by women.

The impact of mergers on gender is that both men and women are more ambitious, women want to prove themselves as being good leaders, males still believe in a culture which labels men as being assertive and decisive. This leads to more of a power struggle, more conflict and more stress. These lead women in lower levels to resist centralisation of some functions, whereas men will continue with an autocratic style to show power. Therefore subordinates will have very few opportunities to realise their power needs in other ways and being promoted to higher levels. This decreases the level of performance and the level of stress goes high (Singh 1994).

3.5.2 The impact of mergers on employment of females

Female have difficulties in exercising their rights to work because men and women have different access to employment. Female are faced with difficulties when they have to choose their professional occupation as it is restricted. Cultural norms of the past have established gender discrimination, for example, it is still a culture in many organisations that secretarial posts are for females, where men are seen as carpenters. There are also sexual stereotypes that aggravate the employment discrimination against females (Mehrotra).⁸

3.5.3 The impact of mergers on professional training

At a university or any other training, there are courses that are still regarded as female courses with few possibilities of advancement. Females are under-represented in certain professions, for example engineering, mining and law. Though this trend is changing, it is for certain levels in a hierarchy (Mehrotra).

3.5.4 The impact of mergers on gender and working conditions

Gender practices that occur at home have affected the organisations. It affects female possibilities of obtaining professional vocational training. In the past, at home, when parents' resources were scarce, parents would chose a male to go to school and receive professional training. The perception was it is useless to invest in girls who will get married and be economically sustained by their partner (Mehrotra). Institutions still discriminate against females in their internal work environment. Issues of promotion, sexual harassment and

⁸ See www.undp.org/rblac/gender/legislation/employment.htm : Gender and Employment

remunerations still affect females more than males. Females still earn less than their male counterparts even if they occupy the same positions.

3.5.5. How less experienced staff are affected compared to the more experienced

Alas and Vadi (2004) mentioned that in the health sector in which their study was conducted, in order to increase overall ability to learn and to implement change faster, they prefer to employ younger people. It is not easy for people older than 45 years to get a job. This has affected their performance because due to birth rate, the work force is ageing. For them to have a preference for young people was that many older people, their work experience was more on soviet organisation. When comparing this with the institutions situation in South Africa, most younger people when one looks at the generation gap, are not yet stable, they want to climb the ladder quickly, want to see themselves in high positions, to them it is about career, not work performance.

Staff competence and interpersonal skills are decisive competitive factors in any institution. Mergers bring change to HEIs, new programmes are added, information sharing with other organisations grows, and skills become important aspects to staff. Staff must be familiar with a wider range of demands that is entering the market. Institutions must produce students who will serve and be an asset to the country. These demands lead to a change in staff profile which undoubtedly requires new skills. Most of less experienced staff are the young ones who have a good background, something to fall back on. To them, a job is not the “be all”. I think there is also the do-not-care group, to whom mergers are just a statistic because their backgrounds are balanced. They do not feel threatened or do not value to work, to them money is not a problem, they work for fun.

Mergers and acquisitions generate high levels of staff anxiety and stress in the workplace. Most staff feel their jobs are under threat, their career prospects and staff competences are questioned. Staff are aware that there are duplicated tasks, positions that need to be eliminated. Labour Unions are at loggerheads as mergers may involve companies recognizing different negotiating partners. Australia's Bureau of Statistics' figures for 1999 show that 685,400 people aged 18 to 64 years had been retrenched with only 55% employed again as at 30 July 1997 (Wyngaard and Kapp 2004).

3.5.6 Whether the impact is related to qualifications, positions or not

The effects of mergers on individuals who feel helpless, experience a loss of self-control and low self-image, should be understood. The issue of qualifications and experiences of staff has nothing to do with a merger's impact on higher education, but with gender mobility. Opportunity for job mobility results from being the right person in the right place at the right time. This is related to the gender issue where men and women hold different jobs and positions. Haveman et al. (2005) asked this question: "Do the positions occupied by men and women account for the effects of organizational dynamics on men's and women's career mobility?" When we look at managerial posts in higher education, most of them are still gender segregated. Staff possess knowledge, skills and abilities that are germane effective operations to organizations. When institutions merge, job qualifications also are affected as staff members have to share tasks of those who have resigned. Most staff resign or take voluntary retrenchment to avoid dislike of the chaotic situation of mergers. This has negative effects on staff as they start to move from job to job. Uncertainty of staff lead some to resign as some see themselves not fitting into the new programmes that are added after merging. Staff feel their qualifications are threatened. This creates fear of being left out when posts are advertised externally to find suitable staff for the job.

The bias that is caused by decision makers determines who moves into and out of the higher level of the institution. The bias of placing men ahead of women in jobs has negative effects on qualifications and positions of staff. The question of who is the most qualified person for the job in a merging institution raises a concern as when two institutions merge, qualifications differ. Gender is often used as a proxy for unobservable qualifications where men are preferred over women. Men are offered managerial positions even if their qualifications do not suit them to be in that job position (Haveman et al., 2005). Jackson and Joshi (2001:211) mentioned that older workers sometimes receive lower ratings from their supervisors but objective measures of performance indicated that older workers are more productive than younger colleagues. This shows that qualification, age and gender has an impact on individuals and institutions as there is a lot of bias from supervisors. When race, age and sex are studied in combination there is tension. Status is more recognised than performance.

Positions in institutions are referred to as type of jobs, type of department that one works in. The positions, if well followed, will help to provide decision makers with more accurate information on qualifications than gender. It is for the intuitive decision maker to use position

in determining who must be in that job rather than using gender as a proxy. There is substantial evidence that men and women hold different job positions in organizations. This is because of the gender gap that is used by organization to earn positions. Because of position differences, males and females receive different job opportunities and they are evaluated differently, which raises a concern to staff that qualifications are not important. Positions held by males and females differ, based on job level and organizational size. Job levels are a signal of knowledge and skills that shape connection to influence others. People in top hierarchy must have certain qualifications, knowledge and skills that differ from staff at the bottom. Mergers had negative impact because when two institution merge, both had their own top hierarchical level with qualifications that suited their institution before the merger. When two organizations merge there is a lot of duplication in terms of qualifications and positions. This also is caused by the names that each institution used to their positions. For example some might call department schools, some units, some head of department, and some directors. Size of the organization also had an impact on qualifications and positions. When mergers occur, the purpose is to reduce costs. Merging will allow some qualifications to be ignored as it will affect the expansion of the structure (Haveman et al., 2005).

3.6 Race as a factor in determining the extent of the autonomic arousal

According to Norris (2003), diversity starts with realisation of diverse interest. South Africa is now in a non-discriminatory stage where it redresses the imbalances of the past. In merged institutions, things like culture need to change to reflect a diverse culture where beliefs, values are revised. The effect is realised when the institutions are to reflect diverse culture. The question is, does South Africa in higher education have all that it takes in terms of redressing the diverse culture of staff and students in relation to teaching, learning and research? To non-academic staff, will the institution be able to address the imbalances of the past in terms of accommodating diverse cultures of cleaning staff and professional non-academics in terms of how they work together in a multi-cultural society? Most knowledgeable and experienced staff are resigning because they cannot tolerate to be led by certain race compared to they have used to. How will the institution address the imbalance when they have a shortage of staff.

When one looks at the purpose of affirmative action, it was to eradicate discriminatory practices and promote skills and abilities of those who have suffered as a result of the past. Unfortunately, educational levels of staff in higher education vary, this is based on the courses they lecture, the expertise they have. To non-academic staff it depends on the skills

they have acquired. External pressure has an effect on the institution, new legislation such as the Employment Equity Act, which requires equity targets and time-tables, which are monitored provincially and nationally, impose pressure on the institutions. The Employment Equity Act will result in institutions having diverse academic and non academic profiles. This is a problem, as Norris (2003) indicated that “while it is accepted that affirmative action is the starting point, on its own it will not work, as the diversity that affirmative action creates will have to be effectively managed, and management of diversity can only be properly executed if it forms part of the organisation’s strategic management process” (Norris 2003).

This has brought a shift in the demographics of students and change of staff profiles by race, gender, social and physical status as well as organisational structure. In education, diversity was viewed as a way that staff would interact, enhance critical thinking, solve problems and change attitudes towards racial issues. Diversity was viewed as a way of staff to make sense. When NCHE and NEPI recommended that staff skills should improve, the idea was to let staff improve their performance and to assist them to deal with change. Weick indicated that in a combination of interruption, which in this study is the merger of two institutions, diversity becomes tight, where there is a loss of cognitive efficiency due to autonomic arousal which is observed by a loss of communication accuracy due to an increase of hierarchical distortion that is created.

Mergers have increased the feeling of fear of loss of jobs, fear of academic privacy and freedom, fear of identity which affected performance. Since mergers occurred in higher education the working atmosphere and working environment turned into unspoiled, unpleasant to staff (Mapesela and Hay 2005). Institutions must acknowledge the issue of diversity of human preference. This is related to culture, social class, family rearing, education and personality. Because of change, diversity has impacted on staff performance, more especially when one looks into the generation gap in higher education. A young person, who has the same qualification as an older person, will have a different approach or pattern to work. Young people want to be autonomous while older people want to supervise. One person will want to be integrated in a team; the older person will want to work alone. Through sensemaking, the institution will realise that each person individually is constructing their identity where space is needed. The institution must work things differently by letting staff select the preferred pattern or develop a unique pattern that will suit almost all. This will give each staff member a free choice and accountability of the work (Walton 1974).

Respect for the dignity of an individual requires professional practice, teaching and research to demonstrate a belief that each person needs to be treated with respect as a person. The effect of a merger allows people to lose their morale, become vulnerable. Their vulnerability is exposing them to emotional exhaustion which finally leads to autonomic arousal. It is upon management of institutions to care adequately for the welfare of staff to avoid discrimination and oppression when merging occurs. To be able to manage the effect, institutions must recognise the inherent value of all human beings regardless of how different they may be from the other. Management must understand one's culture, moral and social beliefs and be sensitive to how this could affect the performance of an individual in the working place.

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter indicated how mergers impact in institutions and organisation can affect staff negatively, if the aspect of human factor is ignored. In an institution, identity, sense of belonging, emotions, morale and families cannot be ignored. One is unable to perform if his /her states of emotions are not exhaust. This is an indication that the issue of perception and identity in merger make staff to feel as if they are not capable of doing some tasks because of who they are in terms of colour, race or creed. Staff during merger cannot deal with uncertainty around themselves.

CHAPTER 4

SENSEMAKING IN ORGANISATIONS

4.1 Sensemaking background

The area of focus is based on a sensemaking perspective, where the interest is in finding out how a sensemaking perspective could bring change in the merging of higher education institutions. In this chapter, I first examine the sensemaking theory of Karl Weick and will attempt to provide the depth of sensemaking in organisations. This examination will be done by using the levels of sensemaking in organisations and interruptions. Thereafter, the frames that can be used to analyse the issue of merger performance such as autonomic arousals, cues and frames of reference will be outlined. The second aim of this chapter is to highlight the essence of sensemaking in a merger of higher education institutions where it will be indicated how the CUT can measure the autonomic arousal during the merger. It is through sensemaking that organisations can strengthen their relationship, particularly in the wake of interruption. Sensemaking often takes place where someone notices something which becomes an interruption in an ongoing flow of events. This something can be in the form of a surprise or discrepancies in cues. This causes a person to look back at the experience acquired to see if what is happening does make sense. Sensemaking will be used as an instrument that can construct identity and environment by staff during a merger.

To Weick (1995:4) the concept of sensemaking literally means “making sense”. It is to make something sensible. A human being only makes sense based on what is experienced. Weick (1995) has been one of the main advocates of the sensemaking perspective within the organisation theory from a social perspective. Sensemaking involves placing stimuli into some kind of framework. When people put stimuli into frameworks, it makes people comprehend, understand, explain, attribute, extrapolate and predict. This causes people to start to communicate, to try to construct meaning and use retrospective accounts to explain surprises. The surprises trigger a need for explanation in a process through which interruption of discrepancies is developed. Louis (1980), cited in Weick (1995:4) suggested that the

activity of placing stimuli into frameworks is most visible when predictions break down, when individuals (re)construct meaning or understanding. This suggests that sensemaking is partially under the control of expectation. When there is expectation, interruptions occur. For people to understand sensemaking they must understand how people cope with interruptions. Because of expectation and interruption, organisations are involved in sensemaking. Making sense of an individual and organisational sensemaking are not the same.

For an organisation to make sense it needs to manage its people well, in terms of being the provider of information and having the welfare of each individual at heart. The concept sensemaking is a process of how people reduce uncertainty or ambiguity and socially negotiate meaning during decision-making events. Weick (1995) states that sensemaking refers to how meaning is constructed at both individual and group level. When there is clarity on meaning constructed, confusion decreases. One can make sense and construct meaning when there is vocabulary and language. Many investigators (Dunbar 1981; Goleman 1985; cited in Weick 1995:4) supported Starbuck and Milliken (1988), who stated that sensemaking involves placing stimuli into some kind of framework. When people place stimuli into frameworks, this enables them to comprehend, understand, explain, attribute, extrapolate and predict. The activity of placing stimuli into frameworks is the most visible when prediction breaks down, which suggests that sensemaking is partially under the control of expectation. Whenever expectation is disconfirmed, some kind of ongoing activity is interrupted.

Louis (1980), cited in Weick (1995:4), regards sensemaking as a thinking process that uses retrospective accounts to explain surprises. There is confusion where sensemaking is regarded as interpretation and vice versa. Interruptions require a special knowledge, whereas sensemaking is about the ways people generate what they interpret about the environment they find themselves in. Sensemaking is about an activity or a process, whereas interpretation can be a process that describes the product. Sensemaking goes beyond interpreting; it is inventing that should be interpreted (Weick 1995). To be able to make sense, something must create the sensation. The sensation will lead someone to construct meaning. Sensemaking is an ongoing process that occurs when people make retrospective sense of the situations in which they find themselves and their creations. People make sense when they see things change from what they already know. By seeing things, people draw their own inventions, interpretation. This is what makes sensemaking a process, an activity and artefact. As language is developed, meaning is constructed during sensemaking, people start to see how they could socialise and share meaning. Some regard sensemaking as a metaphor because

organisational life is captured on a metaphor of reading text. But organisations are not text; text is a form of interpretation. This shows that sensemaking is not a metaphor. Although language and text are metaphor for interpretation, sensemaking is not. Parry (2003) indicated that sensemaking is a social theory in which “maps” of others are momentary stability in this continuous flow.

Sensemaking begins with the perception of some change in the organisational environment. Members of the organisation must understand the differences and determine the significance of changes. Sensemaking processes have a long history on theory of organisations that is explicitly founded on the sensemaking paradigm. There are different approaches that organisations use to approach sensemaking. Most organisations use sensemaking as a central activity in the construction of both the organisation and the environment they exist in. Most of the organisations are now trying to apply sensemaking for decision-making, problem solving and for understanding their organisation much better, especially if there are some changes going on. Sensemaking is defined as a process that emphasises the dynamic, social and respective nature. Weick (1995) argues that sensemaking involves improvisation, identity, construction and the construction of plausible narratives as individuals to cope with ambiguity in interpretation. Weick stimulated the growing comprehension of the subjectivity of organisational life, including making sense and meaning out of existence.

4.2 Why a sensemaking perspective on the merger of CUT?

The concept of sensemaking is well known, as it literary means the making of sense. According to Starbuck & Milliken (1988), cited in Weick (1995:4), sensemaking involves putting stimuli into some kind of framework. It enables people to comprehend, understand, explain, attribute, extrapolate and predict. Sensemaking is viewed as a thinking process that uses retrospective accounts to explain surprise. Thomas, Clark & Gioia (1993), cited in Weick (1995:5), describe sensemaking as “the reciprocal interaction of information seeking, meaning, ascription, and action”. Sackman (1991) cited in Weick (1995:5), talks about sensemaking as the mechanism that organizational members use to attribute meaning of events, mechanisms that include the standards and rules for perceiving, interpreting, believing and acting that are typically used in a given cultural setting. Feldman (1989), cited in Weick (1995:5), views sensemaking as an interpretive process that is necessary for organisational members to understand and to share understanding about such features of the organization as

what it is about, what it does well and poorly, what the problems that it faces are, and how it should resolve them.

According to Vaara (2003), the use of the sensemaking approach in an organisation is about how organisational members make subjective interpretations of the merger events, how they construct meaning accordingly. Organisations apply sensemaking to be able to perceive, believe, interpret, construct, predict and act both individually and collectively. According to Weick (1995), sensemaking takes place when there is an interruption in an ongoing flow of the event or experience. Weick, Sutcliffe and Obstfeld (2005) highlighted that sensemaking in an organisation “involves turning circumstances into a situation that is comprehended explicitly in words and that serves as a springboard into action”.

Because of mergers, institutions must be able to comprehend what is going on, interpret it, attach meaning to it and be able to understand the uncertainty that is created by the mergers. From a strategic point of view, human factors are inevitable in mergers and acquisitions, because mergers require certain levels of integration between the two institutions. Lack of attention to the human factor is an indication why so many well-planned organised mergers fail. This is because the approach used never involves the understanding of the human factor and mostly never approaches mergers from Weick’s sensemaking perspective. If it was utilised it would be an attempt to find reasons for why the merger failed. Most studies that implemented the sensemaking approach in mergers, as Valpola (2001) indicated, have less uncertainty in their mergers.

The sensemaking process, as defined by Feldman (1989), cited by Ntuen, Leedom and Schmeisser (2004), involves understanding of many different and interdependent factors that must be reconciled with the realities and rhythm within the context of the problems. If sensemaking was used before decision was made to merge all South African higher education institutions, many of the resentfulness and uncertainty that is occurring would have been dealt with. This does not mean they would not have happened, if focus on human factors was addressed as part of the motives for mergers from the beginning. Sensemaking will uncover the risks in information and generate plans. On institutional level, the sensemaking process will help the decision makers to see the expected consequences before deciding.

On an individual level, sensemaking helps one to look for explanations and answers in terms of how people see things rather than in structure, how people solve problems by working together.

The effect of mergers on staff is that staff have to redefine the cues that are meaningful in the context, and that they have to figure out where they are in the task, and how they should behave after they were interrupted. In higher education, interruption causes staff to perform less because their cues and frames are becoming more or less. When interruption occurs, all of the limited resources systems are closed. The primary goal is to bring together knowledgeable research from different fields of research which can contribute to the understanding of sensemaking in higher education. Each area of research offers different perspectives on sensemaking and its relationship to other topics such as identity and culture. Each area of research could make a useful contribution to our understanding of sensemaking and how it might be enhanced in a disruptive, interruptive, complex, high time-stress environment.

Interruption is when one shifts the attention from one phase of activity with its attendant resources to another (Kirsh). This switch involves a context switch. In a merger, when the current task environment is left for a new one, it causes disruption that switch context. This context switch determines how intrusive or disruptive it is to staff during the merger. This depends on how staff are holding up during interruption and in the environment, and how staff recover.

As Weick (1995:6) indicates that *“sense may be in the eyes of the beholder, but the beholder vote and the majority rules”*. I chose this theory to understand the reflexes and the effect of a merger on an institution. This is not about how a merger is perceived but how the CUT staff could have avoided low performance, low cues and frames if they understood sensemaking, because sensemaking is based on what Weick (1995) called occasions for sensemaking. The reason being the two institutions are trying to discuss rules they inferred based on the occasion of the situation. Employees in this regard reach a threshold of dissatisfaction with their current jobs, they experience shock of what has happened as it was imposed on them and they initiate action to resolve the dissatisfaction. In a merged institution, sensemaking will assist when knowledge becomes less and less effective, when management has a less and less precise idea of the situation. Their beliefs and knowledge can be interactively constructed by means of enactment and the sensemaking process.

This study is conducted to help the CUT and other merged institutions to make sense of all the changes that occur because of mergers. Sensemaking will help especially on institutional, departmental and personal level to make sense of cultural differences, rational understanding, emotional identification and socio-political manipulation when making decisions concerning

institutional change. The sensemaking approach in this study will help to understand how institutions as inter-subjective organisations can share meanings that are sustained through development and use of common language and everyday social interaction (Weick 1995:38-39). Because staff are exposed to restructuring that comes because of a merger, it is through sensemaking that staff will be able to redefine their identity to reflect the institutional identity and use retrospective knowledge to move on in a new institution. Since a merger is an ongoing process, staff will be able to adapt easily in a changing environment.

To be able to perform, staff have to search for rational understanding of a merger's characteristics and differences. Staff performance in sensemaking will include more or less suppressed emotional identification with either of the merging sides. By applying sensemaking, the institution will realise that though cultural difference is the cause of uncertainty, it is not the only factor determining staff performance. There are complex cognitive, emotional and political processes that have an effect on staff performance.

There is this example, which will indicate how sensemaking is important in decision-making and mergers. Most of us remember the Y2K scare. Companies and people world-wide who relied on computers, were in a state of panic when they learned that their computers might not be compatible with the new millennium. To companies, this was a nightmare, as they thought of losing all the information codified on the systems. On a positive side this allowed companies to interact, communicate more often, know each other and share knowledge. This example emphasises that in mergers, staff performance is affected as staff see the mergers as an indication of job loss, retrenchment, cultural differences, race, equity, diversity, restructuring and gender issue. With the background of companies that went through mergers, one has to realise that mergers cannot be calculated with a specific timetable. Optimism in mergers does not exist.

In institutions, frames in the form of programmes, policies, procedures, culture and behaviour, to name but a few, are affected. When the merger has a negative effect on staff, their cues become low. Mergers are a reflection of individual rather than an organisational reaction. Instead, mergers are associated with lowered productivity, absenteeism. If an institution wants to be able to perform, it has to make sense, it has to address the human factor and understand the emotional state of each individual. It is only through the use of sensemaking that the institution can analyse the complexities of the unexpected interruption of mergers and deal with it. This study will challenge institutions to realise that there is a need to make sense in some situations where interruption was unexpected, where staff

uncertainty affected their performance. The study will indicate to institutions that it is sometimes worth to “drop your tools” to be able to move on, to deal with the situation and construct meaning.

Using a sensemaking perspective will help to interlink the objectives of this study and to highlight the importance of sensemaking during mergers. The sensemaking theory is a fruitful approach to management of institutions to be able to make sense of the factors that affect daily routine. Sensemaking assists in highlighting the roles of internal discussions in organizational processes. According to Weick (1995), sensemaking goes beyond interpreting; it is inventing what it should be interpreted.

A merger creates uncertainty in a working environment. For the CUT merger to be successful, meaning should be constructed to be able to retrospectively adopt things that are worth keeping in a merged institution. Sensemaking is an ongoing process where frames of reference change because of involvement of others in an individual’s life. The sensemaking properties that Weick (1995) mentioned reflect that organisations are able to make sense when they construct meaning and understand it. Weick indicated that sensemaking is a thinking process that uses retrospective knowledge to be able to explain and account for the expected and unexpected surprises. The question could be how the CUT copes with the uncertainty in the institution. Mergers lead staff to be confronted with levels of uncertainty and anxiety.

4.3 What is sensemaking from an organisational point of view?

Sensemaking theory in an organisation is a process that is based on reducing uncertainty in a chaotic environment and negotiates meaning. One cannot talk of sensemaking without mentioning interpretation. Sensemaking in an organisation involves language, talk, communication. To be able to interpret the environment, people must construct a meaning based on the changes occurring in the environment. When meaning is constructed, clarity increases and uncertainty decreases (Ntuen, Leedom and Schmeisser 2004). People in an organisation and as individuals make sense when they try to rationalise what they are doing. Sensemaking is an ongoing process in organizing. It also unfolds when identity in the social context of others engage in an ongoing circumstance from which cues are extracted and makes plausible sense retrospectively and enact more or less order into those ongoing circumstances (Weick, Sutcliffe and Obstfeld 2005).

Organisations are now sharing interest in sensemaking perspectives because the organisations are shifting from rational systems towards open systems. For example, the shift in higher education which is caused by the mergers, changes management, and recognition of organisation's management allow them to view things from a different perspective. In South African higher education, the organisational shift consists of the merger, generation, politics, knowledge management, communication with the environment, restructuring, performance management system, race, values, beliefs, customs, identity and culture (Weick, Sutcliffe and Obstfeld 2005). To make sense of what is happening in and around an institution; staff need to make decisions based on their ability to cope with uncertainty.

Weick (1995) added that people are interested in “what is out there”, “what is in there” and “who we are”. In order to deal with these questions, the use of sensemaking in organisations becomes an issue of central concern. The essential difference between individual sensemaking and sensemaking in organizations is that organizational life is taken for granted to a much lesser degree. Individuals are more open to reconstruct what an organization stands for than to redefine them.

To make sense, the organisation must understand how something comes to be an event for employees when meanings are constructed. An organisation emerges through making sense to be able to become an effective organisation. People make sense when organisations change; others make sense when their jobs are insecure, while others make sense when they are stressed and anxious. Sensemaking and organisation constitute one another. Finally, people organise to make sense and enact this sense back into the organisation to make the organisation orderly (Weick, Sutcliffe and Obstfeld 2005).

Choo (2002) indicates that it is through sensemaking that organisations are able to reduce uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity. There are factors that trigger employees in organisations to apply sensemaking- factors such as rapid change, high levels of complexity, unpredictable situation, and crisis during the merger. These factors forces the organisation to apply sensemaking to be able to make decisions, solve problems improve performance and productivity and to make an effort to give stability to the environment. Weick, Sutcliffe and Obstfeld (2005) indicated that is through the use of sensemaking in an organisation that the circumstances can be turned into a situation that is comprehended explicitly in words and that serves as a springboard for action. The question is when is the right time for an organisation or a person to make sense. This is because sensemaking occurs when the flow in an organisation is interrupted. In this paper for example, the flow of experience in HEIs has been

interrupted by the merger. As institutions involve human beings, when interruption occurs, communication and talk start to take place because there is an uncertainty of the events going on.

Sensemaking is an ongoing process. My expectation in this study about the outcome of sensemaking functionality of mergers in higher education might not fit the puzzle of a merger in higher education. This might not show the correct picture of sensemaking as I expected, but as sensemaking has no beginning nor end, one must realise that this will be a starting point to add more pieces of the puzzle by others to make it complete. I will start by finding out what sensemaking is from an individual point of view.

4.4 What is sensemaking from an individual point of view?

From a human perspective, the nature of sensemaking belies its role in the determination of human behaviour, whether people act consciously or unconsciously. Sensemaking occurs only when there is change in environment, where the institution is complex and perceive or operate in a different chaotic environment, where flow of experience is affected, where frames and cues are affected. To make sense of the interruption, people will look for reasons to keep the interrupted institution where it used to be and stay in action. Lindberg (2002) indicated that human action is generally based on sensemaking in that present moment of experience. Events that take place in an organisation are the results of the process of an individual as well as collective sensemaking process. Nathan (2004) concurs with Weick, Sutcliffe and Obstfeld (2005) that to be able to understand, one has to know that sensemaking involves the ongoing retrospective development of plausible images that rationalise what people are doing. According to Nathan (2004:184), sensemaking is an ongoing activity that looks back to extract particular cues in search of the plausible. Then the particular future is in fact enacted and a certain identity is deepened. This is where employees are concerned with their identity, in the social context of other actors and they become engaged in ongoing circumstances where they extract cues and make plausible sense retrospectively. Weick, Sutcliffe, and Obstfeld (2005) mentioned that, to focus on sensemaking is to portray organizing as the experience of being thrown into an ongoing, unknowable, unpredictable streaming of experience in a search to ensure the question “what’s the story”.

When all these are observed, people are involved in action where organising prevails. In an organisation sensemaking starts with a chaos, where there is interruption, where people had to label and notice some change based on the experience they have. People use their

retrospective experience to make sense in an unstable environment. People connect with the abstract and take action in what is going on and try to do something. Because action cannot be done alone, people become involved in communication. People organise and communicate to make sense of the circumstances in which they collectively find themselves at the end of the events that affect them. To Weick, Sutcliffe and Obstfeld (2005) communication is an aspect which takes place in interactive talk, using language in order to formulate and exchange through talk. Organisations apply sensemaking in their daily operative to be able to have a better understanding of the uncertainty they are faced with. Weick (1995:12) gave this example of a little girl saying: “how can I know what I think till I see what I say”. One has to look back on what existed in an organisation and try to see what makes the existing events not to make sense. This recipe retains several elements of the dissonance theory. This shows that an individual needs to make sense based on thought, choice, retrospective sensemaking, discrepancies and social construction of justification. One starts to make sense through involvement of others because they become influenced by dissonance theory.

Sensemaking in higher education can be used in the current state because of the interruption which makes a shift from experience that is flowing which has affected the action. For the institution to make sense of the unexpected interruption employees had to first search what caused the interruption. In this case what caused the merger? The search must start within the organisational premises; if the premises do not offer valid answers, they should extend the search to the external part of the organization. This process of sensemaking is an indication that no ideas are too small or too big. In merged institutions, staff make sense by attaching meaning to the events in order to understand the situation, understanding to share understanding about such features of the organisation. It is mentioned that initially Weick (1979) regarded sensemaking as “a developing plan” but later in his book, “Sensemaking in Organizations” Weick (1995), defines sensemaking as the “making of sense”, where sensemaking is about placement of items into frameworks, comprehending, redressing surprise, constructing meaning and interacting in pursuit of mutual understanding and patterning. Sensemaking is not synonymous with interpretation, or decision making. It is not interpretation as it encompasses more than how cues, information is interpreted, but it is concerned with how cues were internalised in the first instance and how individuals decide to focus on specific cues.

(Weick, 1995:12) further explains that:

“To talk about sensemaking is to talk about reality as an ongoing accomplishment that takes form when people make retrospective sense of the situations in which they find themselves. There is a strong reflexive quality to these processes. People make sense of things by seeing a world on which they have already imposed what they believe”. People discover their own invention, which is why sensemaking is understood as invention, and interpretation understood as discovery, which can be complementary ideas.

One could ask what sensemaking really is. Weick (1995) defines sensemaking by explaining seven properties of sensemaking as a process which will help to support and indicate an understanding of the merger process in this study.

4.5 The seven properties of sensemaking

Weick (1995) describes sensemaking in terms of a number of properties that show clearly the difference between sensemaking, interpretation and understanding. These properties assist in the interpretation of sensemaking. Looking at these properties, they show that people make sense if they have understanding of what they are doing and meaning of the events. Sensemaking in an organisation affects and is affected by the external environment. Weick (1995) indicated that what is known as a reality is constructed by individuals in relation to their language, groups and experience. These seven properties have been repeated in various researches, but there is a variation in presentation order. Weick's (1995:17-61) seven properties of sensemaking show what is necessary to make sense in the workplace. An overall explanation of these characteristics will be discussed here, while some will be discussed in the next chapter. The seven properties of sensemaking are: Grounded in identity construction, Retrospective, Enactment, Social, Ongoing, Focused on by extracted cues and Driven by plausibility rather than accuracy.

4.5.1 Grounded in identity construction

Sensemaking begins with an individual as a sense maker, whose task is to establish and maintain an identity. Weick (1995:18) used this phrase “How can I know that I think until I hear what I say?” This shows that identity is the core preoccupation in sensemaking which is defined in the process action and interaction. Individuals find themselves in an ongoing process where they expose themselves or determine which face to put on. Individual is in a process of undergoing a continual redefinition, coincident with presenting some self to others and trying to decide which self is appropriate. To be able to make sense, one has to react to

what is going on. To be able to construct meaning, one learns about identities by projecting them into the environment, and observes the results, as people shape and react to the environment.

For one to make sense, one has to reflect back and use the experiences acquired in the past to draw conclusions. The more self one has access to, the more meaning is extracted and imposed in any situation. Weick (1995) highlighted that sense is in the eye of the beholder. This is when people make sense about what is happening to them, where they are involved. In an organisation an individual is in a changing self stage which involves self-enhancement and self-consistency (Weick 1995:20). In self-enhancement, an individual tries to seek and maintain a positive cognitive and affective state about the self in self-efficiency, the self-desire to perceive oneself as competent and effective and, in self-consistency the self-desire to sense and experience coherence and continuity. Nathan (2004:183) supports Weick that identity construction is the basis for imparting meaning to information inside of organisations, and, eventually, determining which problems must be solved. Individuals expose self to determine who to be or which face to put on and make sense with reference to others. Vaara (2003:863) indicated that figuring out what is going on and what should be done is based on who the sensemaker is and what his or her background is. This basically means that an individual makes sense based on what she/he has experienced. As individuals reconstruct identity, they also construct what is outside them.

4.5.2 Retrospective

Sensemaking focuses on retrospect, which analyses meaningful experiences to learn things about the current situations which exist in the form of distinct events. It is because of the experience that meaning is created, which ends up causing attention. Attention is of the past. What ever is happening at the moment will have influence on what is discovered when people glance backward. When institutional goals change, new meaning is created. These occur when an institution environment changes, with the result that the meaning that was attached to the institution, will change. These changes make retrospective sensemaking an activity in which many possible meanings may need to be synthesized (Weick, 1995:27). The statement “If I have known, or had I known” shows that people only know what they are doing after they have done it before. There is action that takes place and thereafter a meaning is constructed. Singletory and Howard (2002) said “To learn what I think, I look back to what I said earlier”. Which means that whatever is happening it has been influenced by what has

already happened? Anything that affects remembering will affect the sense that is made of these memories.

4.5.3 Enactive of sensible environment

In an organisation, people become part of the organisational life, which they end up producing AS part of the environment they face. Nathan (2004:183) mentions that organisations create or enact part of its environment through selective attention and interpretation. Interpretation helps to shape the environment more than the environment shapes the interpretation. People shape and are shaped by the environment. It is through interpretation where people can cope with entities that already exist. People bracket and take notice of what is happening in an environment and label them to make sense. The risk is that people see what they want to see and not what someone describes or what is real. Action and cognition are kept together. Enactment means “people receive stimuli as a result of their own activity” Enactment describes a process, people ask questions, negotiate, prototype, make declarations and definitely speak up so long that things make sense to them. They bracket with the issue forth and back collecting pieces of information to construct a picture (Weick 1995: 30-38; Nathan 2004:84).

4.5.4 Social

Sensemaking is a social process as there is a network of inter-subjectivity that share meaning. This implies that the thought, feelings and behaviour of an individual are influenced by the actual presence of the others. This was supported by Valpola (2001) that when people meet other people they acquire new impressions and can change their minds. One important aspect of sensemaking is who you speak to, what type of listening attitude you have to people. People must socialise with the right people to be able to make sense. Conversation plays a major role in sensemaking. Sensemaking requires talking, interaction, conversations, argument and dialogue with others. Weick (1995) indicated that, when the social anchor disappears and one feels isolated from social reality of some sort, one’s grasp of what is happening begins to loosen. Weick (1995:41) proceeded by saying people who are studying sensemaking, pay a lot of attention to talk, discourse and conversation because it is how social contact is mediated.

4.5.5 Ongoing

Sensemaking never start fresh and never stops cleanly, it is an ongoing process. People are always in the middle of things, which mean that during the process some things will be

turned to be in the past in some point of the process. This means that people move from one situation to the other, they make revised assumptions and beliefs along the way. In the sensemaking process, some things will be referred to the past. How people react to interruption include emotional responses which influence psychological and physiological being (Valpola 2001; Weick 1995:43).

4.5.6 Focus on and by extracted cues

There are things that are noticed than others which make people to make sense out of them. People make sense of anything. It is easy to see the product of sensemaking instead of the process of it. Weick (1995:54-55) gave example of using cues to rescue in a difficult situation. This is the story of the map of the Pyrenees as told by the Hungarian Nobel Laureate Albert Szent-Gyorti, and preserved in a poem by Holub.

The incident happened during military manoeuvres in Switzerland. The young lieutenant of a small Hungarian detachment in the Alps sends a reconnaissance unit into the icy wilderness. It began to snow immediately, snowed for two days, and the unit did not return. The lieutenant suffered, fearing that he has dispatched his own people to death. But on the third day the unit came back. Where had they been? How had they made their way? Yes, they said, we considered ourselves lost and waited for the end. And then one of us found a map in his pocket. That calmed us down. We pitched camp, lasted out the snowstorm, and then with the map we discovered our bearings. And here we are. The lieutenant borrowed this remarkable map and had a good look at it. He discovered to his astonishment that it was not a map of the Alps, but a map of the Pyrenees (Weick 1995:54). To understand sensemaking is to be sensitive to the situation and to be able to extract cues.

The conclusion of the story is when one is active out of something bad, something good can happen. In this story the soldiers kept moving, they noticed cues and they kept updating their sense of where they were. Even if they noticed that they had the wrong cues, they still could have followed it. In life, people are confronted with lots of cues, some are not even noticed? People notice few of the cues and filter their own. What cues to focus on, depends on individual interest and consciousness. Sensemaking focus in and by extracted cues, we notice some things and not the others. We pay attention to particular cues and link them with some ideas that clarify the meaning of the cues. Normally we extract cues that are simple and familiar and that will keep us moving. Extracted cues enable us to act which increase our confidence and confirm our faith in earlier cues. In essence we choose where to pay attention.

4.5.7 Driven by plausibility rather than accuracy

Accuracy to individuals is secondary to plausibility. For a number of reasons, in an organisation people are exposed to many cues with multiple meaning where they need to make sense of it, and they will do so with their knowledge frame. Sensemaking is an individual activity where interpretation does not have to be accurate but plausible. Weick (1995:60) mentioned why accuracy plays a secondary role in analyses of sensemaking is that stimuli that are filtered out are often those that detract from an energetic, confident, motivated response. This is because people need to distort and filter, cues are important to elaborations; speed often reduces the necessity for accuracy in the sense that quick response is more useful than accurate action.

All these properties can be applied in any organisation to resolve the challenges. In an organisation, sensemaking can be divided into different characteristics based on the type of complexity they operate in. For the organisation to make sense, people must be able to make some selection, take some notice of the highlights and be able to connect to the events and be able to take action of those events. Employees in institutions must be able to take action of what they believe in, based on the past, present, future and enactment. Sensemaking is not about the truth and getting the right thing. It is about continual redrafting of an emerging story so that it becomes more comprehensive, incorporate more of the observed situation and is more resilient in the face of crisis (Weick, Sutcliffe, Obstfeld 2005; Weick 1995).

This shows that sensemaking is about plausibility, coherence and reasonableness. It is about the accounts that are socially acceptable and credible. In organisations these seven properties distinctively help the organisation to design and give people a distinct, stable sense of who they are and what they represent (identity). They preserve knowledge from the past, where experience plays a major role (retrospective). Sensemaking is necessary as it encourages action (enactment). To make sense people have to interact, communicate, construct meaning. It is through sensemaking that employees will be encouraged to communicate (social). Sensemaking is an ongoing process. Employees become resilient in the face of interruptions (ongoing). Cues are extracted differently and they change.

4.6 Why is organisational sensemaking necessary?

Sensemaking is necessary in an organisation and in individuals for decision-making purposes. It is through sensemaking where the institution enhances its position and makes increases and share. Sensemaking helps to improve the services, create and provide greater opportunity to

strengthen and stabilise the environment. Weick (1995) mentioned previously that sensemaking is not a metaphor as it exist and can be examined. Sensemaking is a thinking process that uses retrospective accounts to explain a recurring cycle which comprises of a sequence of events occurring over time. Sensemaking is a process whereby the creation of reality as an ongoing accomplishment takes form when people make retrospective sense of the situations in which they find themselves. It shapes organisational structure and behaviour (Claud 2000).

Sensemaking involves multiple tasks often handled by various individuals working together such as connecting, constructing meaning, uncovering hidden relationships, gathering information, efficiently organising and presenting information. In a merger, sensemaking will help to dig up all the messes that were made during planning.

4.6.1 The necessity of individual sensemaking

Sensemaking is necessary to an individual to understand oneself, understand that the “I” cannot exist all the time as one attaches meaning through involvement of others. To individuals, sensemaking can help to reduce the uncertainty of the environment to make the environment certain and make people understand their cues and frames. The challenges of new leadership in an organisation make sensemaking necessary. Leadership is moving from traditional focus to research focus in higher education. For one to cope with the emerging forms of change, understanding of the environment becomes important. Sensemaking will help to pay attention to communication to be able to construct meaning.

Dayaram (2005) indicated that people in a merging process will ultimately drive the success of the changing environment. Despite all the changes that are made by transformation, policies and the success of the implementation rely solely on staff within the merging institutions. When the individual’s culture is affected or taken away from him, hurt prevails, betrayals develop and hatred emerges. To be able to understand, to connect, search and filter and extract relevant information for the new environment, staff have to make sense and understand what the new organisation and leadership entail. When institutions merge, for example, different cultures are combined and, cultural shock prevails. Sensemaking is necessary to help to understand that cultural difference in a merger cannot be viewed in isolation, as it can lead to confusion, hostility and distrust between members (Stahl 2003). How staff members interpret and perceive a new culture is important.

Staff aspects of integration should not be neglected or be underestimated. Uncertainty after the merger could paralyse the new institution if staff become anxious about their future. The ILO report (2001) indicated that when financial sectors merge, most employees develop a feeling of incompetence and discomfort because human relation issues were ignored. This relies on senior management to make sure that they demonstrate strong leadership and a clear vision. Communication between employer and employee must be transparent and satisfactory where explanations are given of why merger is implemented, what is going to happen and who is in charge. Managers must not take it for granted that since staff heard about the mergers, it is not necessary for them as management to explain. The general principle is that the line of communication must be open all the time, where honesty throughout the organisation is preached.

Weick (1995:73) highlighted that it is through generic subjectivity that people share, a lots of others that quality of interaction define the property of an organisation and if this is lost then sensemaking does not exist. Tom Peters (in Weick 1995:73) indicated with fear that information will get lost when managers shift from management by walking around (MBWA) to e-mail and management by screening around (MBSA). Sensemaking will help to shape staff attitude and behaviour reactions towards the merger and their job. Dealing with staff behaviour after the merger, it is the responsibility of the institution to directly relate to staff perception after the merger and become visible to the staff.

Currently little has been discussed about the psychological processes in literature about psychological impact caused by mergers in South African higher education. Previous research focuses more on descriptive and non-theory. It is important to systematically examine the psychological processes as it has a larger effect on staff performance. The purpose is, if the psychological process is well addressed in the merger, post- merger practices much of the uncertainties will be minimised and the institutions will make sense of the situation. Sensemaking in this study will help to fill the gap that is left out in merging of higher education regarding the human factor (Shin 2003).

To Weick, sensemaking is grounded in both individual and social activity. Sensemaking is about comprehending, redressing, surprise, constructing meaning, interacting, in pursuit of mutual understanding and patterning. Weick (1995) concludes by saying sensemaking is not interpretation as the activity and action are involved, while interpretation is just a process. In order to make sense in an organisation, frames of references are affected by interruption,

which make cues and frames to be more or less. It is through sensemaking where individuals do not see only themselves but see themselves and others.

4.6.2 The necessity of institutional sensemaking

The announcement of a merger creates a high degree of anxiety among institutions and individuals. An individual begins to develop fear for his job and the security of his working conditions. To understand key performances of staff, the institution has to understand transformation which depends on shared values, attitudes and behaviour of staff in merging. Alas and Vadi (2004) believe that mergers are embedded in organisational cultures which impacts on facets such as equity and redressing imbalances in the workplace. To Alas and Vadi (2004) analysis of culture in merging institutions reveal the various values, attitudes and behaviour of staff that undergo changes. By revealing these dimensions, according to Weick, it is an indication that institutions are involved in an action, where sensemaking has to take place. When these dimensions are revealed, sensemaking has to take place to identify its impact on staff performance.

In an organisation, traditional tasks of sensemaking are decision-making and problem solving. People can make good decisions but yet continue to filter to make mistakes. Nathan (2004) indicated that sensemaking is about contextual reality that have been built from vague questions, muddy answers and negotiated agreements. Sensemaking is not about understanding; it enables us to make rational decisions, although making effective decisions is an important outcome of sensemaking. Sensemaking helps to give stability to the environment by paying attention to it. When there is interruption, there is no order. It is through sensemaking that order is created and retrospective sense is made of what has occurred.

In an organisation, the necessity of sensemaking will differ according to the organisation's motive for the merger and according to organisational structures and the environment. Uncertainty in an organisation will also determine why sensemaking is necessary because some interruptions and complex environments are for the short term. Sensemaking will also be necessary but also differ according to the different levels in an organisation, for example management, middle and lower level. The way these levels make sense will differ from each other. A different meaning will be constructed as some individuals and institutions bridge uncertainty created by the merger by perceiving the present environment in another way.

When organisations merge, there is a lot of uncertainty. Sensemaking will help the management understand how the organisation must adapt to a changing environment and contribute to reshaping of the environment. Sensemaking will help staff to understand the organisational structures and how these structures enable the organisation to create a workable level of certainty when dealing with situational ignorance and ambiguity (Leedom 2001). On the level of research and decision-making, sensemaking will help one to understand how experts in research make extensive use of a recognition decision model in high time stress situations.

The sensemaking framework will help organisations to influence decision events such as situational awareness and cognitive factors where emotions, beliefs and mental models are involved and its impact on individuals and performance, to understand and be able to share awareness of the situation. Create situational awareness in situations of uncertainty to be able to improve the interaction between staff and to help management respond to the unexpected situations and recognise the situation (Leedom 2001). It is through sensemaking that an organisation will be able to look for explanations and answers in terms of how people see things rather than structures. Sensemaking highlights to organisations that people or human thinking is more important than strategies, change, goals, and plans. It is through sensemaking where people receive stimuli as a result of their own activity.

Organisations have to make sense as there are a lot of continuous and social processes changes through which employees develop a shared frame of reference. The necessity of sensemaking also depends on the complexity of the organisations. Each organisation will use sensemaking differently. It is necessary to make sense as it helps employees, especially in a changing environment, to:

- design, control information that shapes the organisation
- give a changing environment a particular shape by constructing meaning
- enact the sense back into the institution to make the institution more orderly by bracketing experiences and create new features in the environment
- enable the organisation and employees to induce changes in the environment and create discontinuity in the flow of experience
- relate to frames and cues and to connect past moment with present moment to construct a meaningful and stable environment.

In order to maintain high performance, the institution must design some measures that will indicate, monitor the drivers of the institution to be able to monitor the success of the merger. There are some people who still believe that the merger of organisations make sense and it ends there, forgetting that to make sense there should be negotiations, socialisations to reduce the costs. Synergies could be obtained if duplication is removed and adopt better systems that will benefit all and lead to new opportunities. This is why sensemaking is important as the transfer of skills between the merged institutions will help to improve efficiency and processes.

Sensemaking is necessary because it helps institutions to understand and to level their own ambitions, norms, values with those of the organisation in a way that they are contributing to the identity construction of the organisation as a whole, to identify them with the way in which the organisation manifests itself in a society and consequently in organising from a strategic to an operational level. It is through making sense that individuals level their own emotions, norms and values with those of the organisation to identify them in the way in which the organisation manifests itself in society.

Sensemaking helps institutions to make choices on what is considered valuable, construct meaning of the consequences and to be able to deal with and leverage uncertainty. It is through sensemaking that organisations are able to develop cognitive maps of their working environment. Employees use their beliefs as expectation to guide the choice of plausible interpretation. When interruption occurs staff have to redefine their cues that are meaningful within the context (Weick 1995; Singletary & Howard 2004). On the issue of expectation, sensemaking helps to guide the choice of plausible interpretation. Making sense in a changing environment will help management to have face to face interaction with staff by conducting meetings to enable constructive debate and useful clarification.

4.6.3 The necessity of sensemaking for decisionmaking

Sensemaking is deemed necessary at the decisional level for the following reasons:

- for decision making in a complex environment
- induce multiple tasks such as searching, filtering, extract and construct meaning
- understanding what the organisation is all about, whether the organisation is doing well or bad and to deal with problems encountered.

- old mental models do not appear to work in highly complex situations a social-psychological process, namely sensemaking, is necessary to frame the situation and interpret it in new ways (Weick 1995; Singletary & Howard 2004).

Valpola (2001) talks more about the role of identity in integration of the merger where focus is on executives, not on staff. He also talks about what make sensemaking process of staff when the deal of the merger has been made. Sensemaking starts with action, either action that people are responsible for or committed to or actions that have made a visible change in the environment that require explanation or manipulation. The commitment process focuses on single action while the manipulation process focuses on multiple actions, which have a greater emphasis on actual change in the environment. Weick (1995) describes commitment as cunning and manipulation as boldness.

Commitment seems to be the ideal process in sensemaking as it helps staff to share values, frustrations and try to interpret the situation according to their experiences. With commitment, people ask the question why action occurs, for example why the mergers occur, while manipulation focuses on meaning results of the action. Organisation performance is affected. Valpola (2001) highlighted that, even though there are discrepancies, both activities are needed to continue to be competitive in an environment, which changes the whole time. Therefore manipulation is needed as an important process. The best management is able to influence the circumstances where firms exist, the more time there will be to work for commitment, argue and expect behaviour which then in turn is followed by actions in line with the situation needs.

Beliefs can be an unconscious way of influence during the merger. Different parties bring their beliefs to the situation. There will be space for active and heated argumentation, but will there be time and opportunities for it, that is the problem. Starting points can be quite far away from each other in many critical issues in focus of integration. According to studies, expectation of the mergers is related to identity (Valpola 2001). People in the new situation try actively to interpret their position and their possibilities in the new company and use every cue available to get information of their identity.

Sensemaking is necessary when the environment is experiencing interruption as staff have to redefine their cues that are meaningful in the context. Krish⁹ indicated that when an interruption occurs, all our limited resource systems are deeply effected Employees have to

⁹ <http://interruptions.net/literature/Kirsh-Unpublished02.htm>

figure out where they are in the organisation. Application of sensemaking in a merger will help management not to push decisions on staff, as it creates problems. Staff end up being unable to make sense of what is happening because they lack a broader understanding and involvement in the process.

4.6.4 Conscious sensemaking during uncertainty

Uncertainty in an environment make people take action as people lack understanding of how components of the environment are changing or how changed environments have an impact on organisations. Information is needed to reduce uncertainty that will show what direction the actor ought to be going because of the way the future of the world is evidently turned out.

Organisations feel the necessity to make sense as cues become less and frames become few and it affects the processes in the organisations, where flow of experience also is affected. What differs in the sense making is the explicit acceptance of reality assumed to be both orderly and chaotic. Because of chaotic environments, people extract cues from their experience and start to notice and bracket some vital signs such as emotional exhaustion, stress, interruption that vary with the normal operators. These signs are noticed when it affects performance. It is through the mental model that staff recognise the changes in the environment (Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld 2005).

Sensemaking is approached as a social activity that involves emotional elements, not only cognitive processes. It is through sensemaking where one can distinguish rational, emotional and political elements. Sensemaking helps to understand the specific phenomenon such as explaining why staff performance is affected by the merger and why autonomic arousal becomes systemic in the merger. As noted by Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld (2005), sensemaking can suddenly and catastrophically break down when decision makers, leadership teams and organisations face novel and unexpected conditions in the operational work environment. When an organisation lacks or there is no sufficient information available to describe the current situation like a merger, action is affected. An organisation can try to reduce uncertainty by acquiring additional information relevant to the problems. There are times where uncertainty can be tolerated by using assumptions to fill the missing information where management must accommodate and respond to critical areas to avoid worse situations and stress.

In a merged institution, when members of staff learn about the merger, stress is elevated. In addition to sheer work, the stress also stems from a huge increase in uncertainty, which

causes staff to lose their identity, information is lacking, obsession with self-survival, coping with loss of talent and family repercussions. Staff members react differently to this type of stress. They become self-centred, some become counter productive in relation to psychological and emotional reaction of employees, some become angry, they are in a state of denial and depressed. Uncertainty is an the extent to which the members of a culture feel threatened by uncertain or unknown situations. The feeling of uncertainty is expressed through nervous stress. Uncertainty is caused by lack of responsibility, incompetence, negative attitude towards the institution. Burns and Stalker (1961) cited in Weick (1995:95), define uncertainty as the ignorance of the person who is confronted with a choice about the future in general, and in particular about the outcome which may follow any of his possible lines of action for the person. To remain operative, he must act in accordance with his belief about the future and the specific possibilities and these possibilities will always be differentiated in his mind according to the degree of belief with which they are credited.

Out of the points mentioned above, the focus will be that sensemaking is necessary in an organisation because, when interruptions occur:

- cues and frames are reduced or stop to exist.
- that flow of experience is interrupted and cause low performance
- that autonomic arousal in individuals arise

When the complexity and uncertainty in organisations continue, cues and frames are affected, the flow of experience is affected, autonomic arousal becomes high and emotional stability of staff and families are affected. Sensemaking become a necessity as information loads become complex mixture of the quantity, ambiguity and variety of information that people are forced to process. Sensemaking will help where cues and frames becomes less, where one person has access to more than one frames also where flow of experience, which is ongoing, is interrupted.

4.6.5 Conscious sensemaking when cues and frames are reduced or affected

Employers and employees are to make sense during interruptions because cues and frames are affected. Cues are seen as occurrences or experiences that people have. When cues such as skills, competences and tacit knowledge are lost, frames become less and the level of autonomic arousal increases. In mergers, cues can be in the form of wrong information that

staff receive from gossiping or management. Wrong information will prevent staff to do their jobs. Criticism and complaints are examples of cues that can have a negative impact on institutions. Sensemaking assists to connect the cues with frames that already exist or not exist. Cues are affected when interruption occurs, where there is interpretation of the situation. During interruption, cues have to be swapped out in the appropriate activity, whereas frames are associated (Valpola 2001). Cues in this environment indicate change of focus; frames are used in conversation to set apart all subsequent dialogue as belonging to a different focus. Valpola (2001) indicated that people carry their frames from tradition, work, home, organisation and society. It is for the institution to understand the frames of the employees, which frames they have and which frames have, which frames were previously used to make sense.

Merging is about sense-giving (frames) than sense-taking (cues). Sense-giving is where cues connect with frames that already exist. Frames in a merger change as they are viewed or painted from different perspectives. In this research, the idea is to connect some tasks with tradition, work of the institution or institutional knowledge. In sense-taking, there are no frames, frames need to be created. Merged institutions need to create frames that will accommodate staff interpretation based on the old frames. Snow, Rochford, Worden and Benford (1986), as cited in Weick (1995: 109) indicated that frames enable people to locate, perceive, identify and label occurrence in their daily lives and world. In merged institutions frames will enable employees to compare the past; using experiences they have to interpret the current environment.

It is through frames that institutions will be able to make sense. In merged institutions, it is for the institution to make sense of the ambiguous environment signals and implement strategic responses in a timely fashion. Organisations that are merged need to be involved in sense making to be able to generate knowledge that will stabilize the organisation environment. What causes frames and cues to change or be affected in an organisation. The characteristics of sensemaking which are made up of interaction and cognition by actors within the organisation show that the emotions of employees are affected when interruption takes place. There are grounded theoretical frameworks that each organisation follows as a means of structuring findings that emerge. There are strategies that top management follows that influence their sensemaking activities, such as top management perception of institutional identity and image. These were not seen as a threat before merging. But after merging it became a threat as identities of institutions differ. Although change in the external

environment influences the interruption process in the internal environment, it also exerts considerable influence (Gioia & Thomas 1996: 371).

Organisations need to have structure strategies in place which is affected by interruption or change. Sensemaking is necessary because of the interruption that occurs in an organisation, which makes frames and cues affected and infected. People focus on particular cues to make sense. Robins highlighted that cues indicate changes of focus (Robins 1997)¹⁰.

Cues are seen as occurrences or experiences. Frames enable people to locate, perceive, identify and label occurrence in their lives and world. When cues and frames are affected, performance will be affected too as an individual will not know where and what must be done or what to connect. Connections are human actions that produce meanings by relating to cues with frames (Weick 1995). Interruptions affect cues and frames. During interruptions, cues have to be swapped out in the appropriate activity, whereas frames are associated.

During the merger, the interruption in the two institutions is like being forced to jump to another state. The challenge in the merger is to try to minimise interruption and to adapt to a new environment quickly. When employees switch context, they redefine their cues that are meaningful in the context, they have to figure out where they are in the task and so forth. In an organisation, if cues and frames are affected where individuals have access to more than one frames because of job losses and doing more frames, individual emotional activity will be affected and one needs a sensemaking process to deal with the ongoing interruption to be able to reconstruct meaning. This shows that when interruption produces arousal, it reduces the cues that can be used in sensemaking, where attention is on the interruption which makes cues to be less, which make sensemaking harder, which raises arousal even higher, which leads to even more cues loss and even less sensemaking. The loss of cues in sensemaking, in response to increased arousal, leads people to narrow and focus their attention on those aspects of the situation judged most important (Weick 1995:101-102).

Many organisations ignore the issue of staff after the merger. This is observed when survivors after mergers do extra tasks, where cues are just divided the way they want to without looking at staff satisfaction, experience, knowledge and skills. Institutions do not look at this in a scientific manner. Some organisations just absorb staff without looking at the skills they require in that specific unit. Adeyemi (2005) supports the statement that by doing so, it affects performance as the particular staff member do not have skills in that specific

¹⁰ www.asis.org/annual-97/shifts.htm

field, the staff members frame of work becomes less as he is doing something he does not know. When cues and frames are affected by the interruption flow of experience is also affected.

4.7 Sensemaking and the flow of experience

The flow of experience is an ongoing process. People make sense based on their past experience. According to Weick (1995), sensemaking occurs when the flow of experience is interrupted in an environment. This occurs when there is a shift from the experience of immersion in a project to a sense that the flow of action has become unintelligible and in some way interrupted. Weick, Sutcliffe and Obstfeld (2005), relate that it is during the flow of experience where employees will bring sense of meaning that they hope will stabilise the environment to make them perform in their work and make sense and be in touch with the ongoing flow of experience. The flow of experience can be analysed when there is interruption, anxiety and unstable emotion. Flow of experience is seen as emotional experience where physiological and cognitive components of emotion are affected.

The flow is an ongoing experience which represents an ordering in consciousness. The flow happens when there is interruption, when challenges are high and personal skills are used to the utmost. Choo (2002) indicated that sensemaking is precipitated by a change in the environment that creates discontinuity in the flow of experience, engaging the people and activities of an organisation.

Weick, (1979) as cited in Choo (2002), indicate that people have to enact and construct the environment to be able to make sense. Interpretations of the environment become a necessity where people connect sequence of enactment, selection and retention. In enactment, as Choo (2002) indicates that people actively construct the environment which they attend to by bracketing, rearranging and labelling a portion of the experience and convert raw data of the environment into equivocal data to be interpreted. Weick (1995) mentioned that it is the flow of experience that makes sense. The organisation and individual carry cues from the past and construct meaning to the future. Weick explains this through the story of Garfinkel, which shows that even if a person lives in the present, when judgement is past, his or her past will be used, the past is used to interpret the future. Cognitive dissonance plays a major role as it includes the ideas of enactment, commitment and justification.

4.8 Sensemaking and leadership

In an age of uncertainty and change, leaders need to look outside their organisations. Leadership must try to make sense of their environment by applying sensemaking to try to find and blaze the trail.

To leadership capability, sensemaking resembles map making “where we are”, “where and why we are going”, “what we should look for as we go”. The sense maker’s insight can enable organizations to move from good today toward great tomorrow. Sensemaking can foster better decisions in a fluid environment. Sensemaking enables everyone in an organisation to understand a situation and drive towards the same goals.

Leadership in an organisation constitutes the following aspects which are important in sensemaking: act, communicate, observe, question and reassess.

- Act, leadership must be in charge of the changing environment. They must explore, take action. This will help them to think and look for new ways that could help to communicate with the entire organisation.
- Communicate; leadership must have open channels of communication, all the time. Barriers of communication must be eliminated. This will help others to understand complex situations, enabling others to act.
- Observe, leadership must pay attention to the environment. Weik (1995) mentions that leadership must manage by walk, this will help them to know any changes or any uncertainty that staff feel.
- Question, in a changing environment people ask for help, and they expect leadership to have all the answers. When staff do not get answers from leadership they can open up about their problems and gain perspective from outside advisors. Because of pressure, staff fall back on their habitual ways of responding. But during merger innovative solutions are needed. They should not rely on past situations.
- Reassess, it is the responsibility of leadership to draw any conclusion. Leadership must realise that yesterday’s choices may not work today.¹¹

¹¹ From the article: http://mitleadership.mit.edu/pdf/Making_a_Difference_by_Making_Sense.pdf. is a MIT leadership Center.

4.9 Levels of organisational sensemaking

For one to understand and make sense in an uncertain environment, one has to understand the interplay between interacting, subjects, inter-subjective and the collective “we” and the generic subjectivity in an organisation. Dubravka Cecez-Kecmanovic and Cale Jerran (2002: 896) indicate that, in order to understand the nature of knowledge in an organization, it is important to distinguish and analyse different types of knowledge at particular sensemaking levels and investigate the impact of one level on the other and tension between them. These could be observed or noticed by the way staff interact, the pattern of communication used and organizational rules. This is because sensemaking is carried out by a different entity in an organisation. Weick (1995:70-71) mentions four levels, which are:

- Levels of individuals (intra-subjectivity), where thought, beliefs, desires and intentions are involved.
- Levels of social interaction (inter-subjectivity)
- Levels of social structure where social reality is characterised by (generic subjectivity) which is formed and maintained.
- Level of organisation culture (extra-subjectivity)

The last three levels of sensemaking should be understood as different generalisations of social reality which distant from the individual. These three levels of sensemaking help to understand the nature and cause of autonomic arousal that employees observe during interruption. Each employee carries sensemaking differently, which the self end up in interaction. The nature of the organisation, the size and the situation operate in all these levels. These levels will help in understanding the objectives of this study and the nature of the sensemaking processes.

4.9.1 Intra-subjectivity

This involves a person’s values, beliefs, assumptions, experience and skills. In this level, individuals interpret and make sense of the environment. Individual actions and the actions by others help to make sense. This is where an individual interpretation of the situation is created and becomes visible. Individual knowledge is created and maintained and used by intra- subjective sensemaking. In a merged institution, staff are involved or has been involved in operations of the institution. The experience faces new problems and makes sense of them. Wiley (1988), as cited in Weick (1995:71), regards this level as a human individual where

thoughts, feelings, intentions are merged into conversation during which the self transforms from “I” into “WE”. The “I-ME” duality or both is conceived as a version of internal conversation.

Rudolph and Repenning (2002) highlight that a lot of cognitive responses overload. There is omission, simply ignoring some signals, error, handling them incorrectly, queuing, filtering, attend to important interruption. When interruption continues, performance drops, individual level responses prevent the inevitable slides down to the right side of the Yerkes-Dodson curve caused by increasing levels of stress. In this level, communication is monologue. Inter-subjectivity as individual is called intra-subjective. The meaning is within the self.

4.9.2 Inter-subjectivity

This is a group-to- group connection where individuals connect with others, working towards a common goal. People interact in multiple social worlds where they interpret cues, negotiate, apply expectation and commit or make decisions. Inter-subjectivity is a state of interaction where perspectives can be mutually understood. As individuals interact in a group, they have to modify their understanding with that of the other and construct shared meanings. This is where sense of common meaning develops. People connect together through some combination of technologies. Through the experience of interacting with each other and making sense of the environment, a sense of common meaning, inter-subjectivity is developed. This is characterized by different types of sensemaking, where people interpret cues, negotiate, apply expectation and commit to decision (Mark and Abrams)¹². When staff of two institutions that merged, interact, they experience each other and create a favourable condition, modify their own understanding based on what others do and construct a shared meaning. (Mark and Abrams) Inter-subjectivity refers to a state of interaction whose perspective can be mutually or reciprocally understood, for example, sharing a common environment where people experience each other. Understanding is shared that emerge through social interaction. Individuals are engaged in communication, interpret events and situations inter-subjectively and create synthesised meaning that transcends individual knowledge.

This is an ongoing process which has neither beginning nor end. But it focuses on specific issues. Rudolph and Repenning (2002) said the handling capacity, coordination and control affect the location of the tipping point again. If the level of interruption continues to increase

¹² www.ics.uci.edu/~redmiles/chiworkshop/papers.Mark.pdf.

people will be overwhelmed and the crisis will ensure coordination is required to resolve the crisis. A high level of synergy will help the group to optimise capacity and coordination. Wiley (1988), as cited in Weick (1995:71), described inter-subjectivity as emergent upon interchange and synthesis of two, or more, communicating selves. The interactive synthesis is about how self transforms during interaction. In higher education, teaching, learning and research form part of the inter-subjective activity.

In this level, the meaning is not within but between, among selves as the individual produces the key to conceptual categories of the collective consciousness. There is interchange of knowledge and communication. In the beginning of every beginning, people come together and have discussions. Multiple individuals participate in joint actions. People participating in discussion find something common which leads to community of practices, and people or individuals who started speaking "I" start to speak "WE". This is because collective knowledge is reached. People are interacting in different levels where they interpret cues, negotiate, apply expectations and commit to decision. With this experience, interaction and making sense of the environment develop.

It is in the inter-subjective level where the inter-group meets. Individuals are identified in the group. The group has to use their past experience, history to make sense. The idea of this level is to make an agreement on the vision and policies of the merged institution. Influence of group to individual is observed as expectation and intention to develop mutual understanding forward rebuild the success of a merger. One view would come up from one area because of the membership and the people who were in that group, and another view would be coming up from another area and it was never clear exactly how these views were going to be resolved.

Weick (1995) support the above statement, by saying to be able to make sense people must interact, share ideas. Though it is not a simple thing to interact when people meet as a group to discuss, they inherit cognitive conflict which already exist where there is a strong identification with the past. Given the objectives of this paper, the focus will be on the inter-subjective level and the interaction with the generic level. The individual and cultural level will be referred to when necessary.

Weick (1995:71) highlighted that inter-subjective meaning becomes distinct from intra-subjective meaning where an individual's thoughts, feelings and intentions are merged into conversations during which the self is transformed. Things are done collectively where

individual selves get transformed from “I” into “WE” where norms are shared and connection is through social structure than social interaction.

Interaction does not always remain at the same levels. According to Wiley (1988), cited in Weick (1995:71), the level shifts from inter-subjective to generic subjective, where the human being changes where selves remain behind at the interactive level to the societal and cultural level. Through interaction, individual meaning is combined and become one, which turns into generic subjectivity. When the inter-subjectivity level slips away due to the rich availability of feedback, generic subjectivity emerges to maintain a collocated setting as an extension which people have to follow. Individual meanings can merge with inter-subjective meaning, which in turn can emerge into general subjectivity, which is the societal level. There are different types of sensemaking where people interpret cues, negotiate, apply expectation and commit to decisions.

4.9.3 Generic subjectivity

Organisational knowledge such as structure, resources, policies, rules is shared. Rudolph and Repenning (2002) view this level as a shift which reduces overload. In this level, human being is not in existence. Self is left behind at the interactive level. This deals with social structure, subjects do not exist, this means the concept of self is subordinated to social control structure in an organisation. Here the institutions make decisions. Ceces-Kecimanovic (2000) describes this level as social structure that reveals itself through policies, norms; decision-making that are legitimised organisational knowledge. The social structure is constructed through arguing, expecting, committing, manipulating processes (Weick 1995:170). These processes work as a tool for individuals to reconstruct meaning and put structure in place. This is where staff raise their perception of reality of others to be able to make sense of the environment and determine what will work for them. Interaction is formed in this level. There is a control structure that is formed where people can substitute one another.

4.9.4 Extra- subjectivity

This is the level of analysis, symbolic reality which has references that individuals identify with consciously or unconsciously. New and different interpretation is attached, based on uncertainty. The generic level is replaced by pure meaning without a knowing subject. It is with this level that challenges can be overcome as it is a cultural level where there are no rules. Individuals bridge uncertainty about the future by perceiving the present in a secure way. This shows that the present reconstruct the past, this is where individuals all the time

refer to the past which allows them to resist change. In a merger, individuals identify themselves with the past which can be the old identity of the institution, mission, values and operational strategy. This past history is influenced by the anticipated changes in the status of the group, where individuals make references. Sometimes this allows the individual's perception to influence their attributes, motives and objectives (Kujala and Weinmann 2003:18-19).

All these levels cause tension, because people substitute for one another but when they do, the substitution is never complete. There is a loss of some understanding when inter-subjectivity is translated to generic subjectivity. When social interaction is converted face-to-face social interaction, the interaction continues. To be able to overcome the tension, communication should be a continuous process. If communication activity becomes confused, interruption will lead to less performance.

4.10 The merger as an interruption

Mergers are one of the non-novel interruptions, which have an existing repertoire, which is appropriate response. This does not mean that the events are created equally. To be able to resolve the non-novel interruption, it requires a shift to an active mode of cognition, which means the employee has to think before interruption can be resolved successfully, though it is difficult to identify and carry out the appropriate response. This is where the response differs, as some require less time to identify and execute than others. When the merger occurs, there is a lot of anti-trust between employee and employee, between employer and employee.

Interruption is interpreted in different mental steps. Interruption can be expected or unexpected. Whenever an expectation is disrupted, some kind of ongoing activity is interrupted. To understand sensemaking, one has to understand how people cope with interruption. Organisations that experience change find their daily routine being interrupted. Interruption induces an emotional response which causes emotions to influence sensemaking. When emotions are affected, autonomic arousal is triggered by the interruptions of ongoing activity (Weick 1995:101).

Because of interruption, the environment, employee, frames and cues are affected. There are lots of interruptions in an organisation, which could be from minor to major interruptions. There are interruptions that are not threatening that we experience in our daily lives. This does not threaten physical or social survival. Weick (1995) indicate that to understand sensemaking, one must understand how people cope with interruption. Interruptions which

are minor, which are annoying but do not have an effect on individuals and the organisation are for example: e-mails, pop-up websites that appear on the screen when one is busy with research. The major interruptions are like mergers of institutions. These are interruptive and disruptive to the current task environment. When interruption occurs, all of the limited resource systems are deeply affected.

In this study a merger is an interruption that needs to be altered to avoid it leading to autonomic arousals. Merger as an interruption becomes a threat to staff and if the threat is not dealt with and the arousal continues it will register in consciousness and interfere with ongoing cognitive activity. As arousal continues to increase people neglect their cues that are crucial to their performance and pay attention to their own agitated condition and their performance drops. Loss of cues and drop of performance occur sooner in an interrupted organisation. As arousal increases, people lose their personal control. Their performance will be affected and take a U-shaped curve. The U-shaped curve will be discussed, based on the effect of autonomic arousal, how this causes the U-shaped curve to change, how cues are filtered out where they become less and frames become less too.

Mergers are regarded as an interruption that impacts on the daily running of institutions, where institutions have to create committees, working on a time-frame to implement the merger. The way it happen it had a great interruption which was interpreted differently by staff and students. The merger itself as interruption causes uncertainty, uncertainty causes emotional exhaustion, which leads to confusion, low morale, sabotage, stress, absenteeism and job dissatisfaction that finally leads to autonomic arousal in staff. All these are some of the after-effects of mergers that occur when institutions ignore the human factor. The ILO report (2001:27) and Shin (2003) indicate that by neglecting the human factor, it becomes is a frequent cause of failure in mergers.

Interruptions are defined as events that threaten the survival and goals of organisations. A Merger is one of the interruptions. The way institutions perceive or detect meaningful signals varies according to the beliefs of the institutions and experience of the staff. This also depends on whether their reaction is vigilant or not. Sensemaking is important during interruption because individuals are involved and it will help to manage the interruption. If the organisation understands the processes of sensemaking, it will help to prevent impact which can be negative.

Nathan (2003) supports the statement by saying sensemaking helps the organisation in handling and understanding crisis management in organisations. She said the organisation's memory of the past is an important facet of crisis management. Interruption breaks the flow of discourse. Immediately when frames are interrupted, one has to make sense to be able to control the level of arousal not to be high. Weick (1995) and Valpola (2001) remark that successful sensemaking depends on the adequacy with which content preserves flow and continuity. To change things that are grounded require sense. Content of sensemaking is found in the frames and categories that summarise past experience in the cues and labels that snare specifics of present experience and in the ways these two settings of experiences are connected.

When the merger takes place, employees feel excluded from the discussion. This exclusion leaves employees with no frames, which makes it hard for them to make sense. Weick regards frames as the past moment of socialisation and cues tend to be present moment of experience. If employee can construct a relation between the two, meaning is created.

4.11 How the merger as interruption led to autonomic arousal

When interruptions or new events occur, unexpected events will occur. Either way, a cognitive activity is interrupted which leads one to cope, make decisions and learn. It is because of uncertainty that autonomic arousal occurs. Autonomic nervous systems absorb information-processing capacity which decreases the efficiency of complex thought processes. Autonomic activity which is interrupted depends on degree of organisation of the action that is interrupted, severity of interruption such as high external demands to complete the action. It is through autonomic activity that people are alerted about the threatening events. The disadvantage is if the alert is ignored or not handled well with the interference of an ongoing cognitive activity, the disadvantage is that if the alert is ignored or not handled well, interruption will produce arousal which uses attention to reduce the cues that can be used in sensemaking and to perform. Loss of cues makes sensemaking harder, which raises arousal higher (Weick 1995:102).

To be able to manage autonomic arousal in an organisation, one has to engrave a pattern of reaction, make a movement in merged institutions where one moves position, constantly increases cues and frames of references. During this period of the merger, people lack understanding of how components of the environment change, as they resist change. Autonomic arousal is triggered by interruption of ongoing activity. Arousal has physiological

significance because it prepares staff for “fight or flight” reactions. Arousal warns the individual to initiate action. Arousal develops slowly but occurs faster after the interruption has occurred. The slowness gives staff time for appropriate action to occur. Autonomic arousal can be measured when tension rises, where people try to make a link between the present situation and the relevant prior situation to make sense of the arousal. Emotion occurs between the times an organised sequence is interrupted. If this continues, staff become rebellious.

Cartwright and Cooper (1992), mention that the human aspect in the mergers has been given little attention or is ignored, which it should not be. People are seen or labelled and forgotten. Because of this labelling, people are affected by the merger. The merger as interruption affect staff performance as their entire task in the organisation is affected and their emotional being is affected. The cause of autonomic arousal in staff emanate with the motives of the mergers. Some organisations merged for personal gain, where staff welfare is ignored. Some organisations, for example, merged to renew their credibility to be able to restore their own self-confidence. The effect of interruptions is that it causes uncertainty, which leads to lower morale, job dissatisfaction, unproductive and poor performance, absenteeism and stress.

In case of performance, arousal increases. People invest more in things that are not related to their tasks, whatever tasks becomes the focus of their attention, they ignore cues. When arousal increases, cues are neglected and performance is affected. Staff redirect their attention to some frames related to interruption. Autonomic arousal affects performance, because staff members become anxious and view the environment negatively when cues are lost. It takes less interruption, less arousal and makes complex tasks sensitive. As arousal increases, people tend to abandon learned responses which could be procedures, policies and mission of the institution and focus on things that affect them.

Sensemaking is an ongoing process where emotion in a person develops when interruption occur. This generates either negative or positive emotion when resumption is facilitated. Weick, Sutcliffe and Obstfeld (2005) mention that if emotions are restricted to events that are accompanied by autonomic nervous system arousal, if the detection of discrepancy provides the occasion for arousal, and if arousal combines with a positive or negative valence cognitive evaluation of the situation, then sensemaking in organisation will often occur amidst intense emotional experience. Autonomic arousal occurs when the flow of things are interrupted, when individuals cannot take it. Autonomic arousal can become a threat to organisations or individuals.

Arousal is caused by staff members when they suppress their anger and mistrust, and their negative feelings trigger reactions that range from generalised stress to demoralisation, depression and burn out. These in turn lead to a decrease in performance. Interruption such as the merger causes poor morale and increases job insecurity for the retained staff. Rudolph and Repenning (2002) indicated that interruption increases the level of autonomic arousal by absorbing information processing capacity, decreases cognitive efficiency and it reduces the number of cues they were able to notice and process during the flow of the experience. As interruption progresses, performance declines. Frames become less and communication declines.

To be able to control arousal in staff during a merger, active response should be allowed where there is no opportunity to fight or flee, as this becomes stressful to the body.

Sindran (2000-2005) defines autonomic arousal as a physical symptom which occurs automatically when a person perceives a situation to be life-threatening. Also known as nervous system hyper-reactivity, this physical response bypasses the cognitive/thinking process and generally includes an elevated heart rate, dilation of pupils, perspiring, and other fear responses (Sindran 2000-2005).

Interruption occurs in a flow of experience and ongoing actions, plans, cognitive structure and emotional gestalts. Interruption is defined as any unanticipated events, external to the individual that temporarily or permanently prevents completion of some organised action, thought sequence or plan. As interruption causes autonomic arousal to staff because of anxiety, it leads to low performance which is caused by stress. This causes the U-shaped autonomic arousal, in most cases damaging the organisational performance (Weick, Sutcliffe and Obstfeld 2005).

An interruption does not only lead to autonomic arousal, it reduces cues and escalates cognitive inefficiency. If cues are lost, sensemaking becomes harder and rises which leads to job loss, less cues and less frames. If this cognitive efficiency is not addressed, arousal will continue and register consciousness and interfere with ongoing cognitive activity and performance. Immediately when the merger is announced, employees articulate fear about the type of interruption that will emerge. Staff think of losing their jobs, retrenchment and not climbing the ladder. All these factors increase stress and staff think they will lose recognition. They do not see possibilities of promotion. Fear of the merger comes differently to staff (Appelbaum et al. 2000).

Arousal is realised and explained in many theories and is closely related to anxiety and stress. Autonomic arousal is a biological mechanism to protect the organism from physical harm by preparing it for action, whether in the form of “fight or flight” in response to threat.

4.12 Measuring the interruption

Interruption in the form of a merger will be measured by using the effects it has on staff based on autonomic arousal and performance. To be able to measure autonomic arousal in this study, a merger as an interruption will be dealt with. It is a fact that autonomic arousal affect performance based on individuals, institutional and departmental level. Sensemaking occur among individuals, departments and institutions. Different ways of sensemaking among the three are considered the source of measuring autonomic arousal. The merger as interruption has an effect on staff, as members feel threatened by an uncertain environment. This feeling is expressed through emotions and stress (Kosaka 2001). Measurement will be linked to the respondent of the interview.

Sensemaking in higher education can be used in the current state because of the interruption which made a shift from experience that was flowing which has affected the action. For employees to make sense of the unexpected interruption, they had to know first what allowed them to resume the interrupted activity and stay in action. The reason can only be found in organisational premises. If premises do not give valid answers they must look for solutions. This nature of sensemaking is that no ideas are too small or too big. In merged institutions sensemaking will assist in attaching meaning to the events to understand the situation, understanding to share understanding about such features of the organisation. It is mentioned that initially Weick (1979) regarded sensemaking as a “developing plan” but later in his book.

From a sensemaking perspective, when the CUT as an institution merged, it is important to understand the interaction that takes place to be able to attach meaning. It is through interaction where the objectives of this study will be understood.

4.13 Conclusion

If I summarise this chapter, Weick and other researchers highlighted how, through a sensemaking framework, organisations can be able to eliminate uncertainty in the environment. Weick’s approach did not cover the gender issue per se. It is through his seven properties and level of sensemaking where one can deduce and interpret it to suit the situation

that higher education institutions find themselves in. It is through sensemaking that individuals at the CUT will be able to look for answers in terms of how they see things, including the merger, and how they interpret the meaning to suit their situation. To be able to understand my research question, interviews were conducted whereby I indicated sensemaking can be used to create an understanding of the merger that took place at the CUT. In the case of merging Wyngaard and Kapp (2004) indicated that staff from the technikons were the ones that saw the merger as being a takeover. To be able to investigate if Wyngaard and Kapp's (2004) view is true, I interviewed staff from the then TFS and VUWC to see if the merger was really seen as a takeover. I will also reflect back to the sensemaking perspective to see if the merger does affect identity construction and whether the levels of sensemaking in the merger are affected and if the social aspects of the institution and staff are affected, and whether a merger is an ongoing process and whether the merger did cause autonomic arousal in staff from a sensemaking perspective. According to De Wet (2004) the former TFS staff members were not excited with the merger, while the VUWC staff were excited and seeing the merger as an answer to some of their difficulties.

It is through sensemaking that organisations can make sense of their environment where communication will become a key in an attempt to reduce multiple meanings and to be able to construct meaning which will help to handle a complex environment. It is through the use of a sensemaking perspective where organisations can articulate questions that they can pose to themselves in order to get answers to their changing environment.

This chapter indicated how mergers impact on institutions and organisations and how they can affect staff negatively, if the aspect of the human factor is ignored. In an institution, identity, sense of belonging, emotions, morale and families cannot be ignored. One is able to perform if his /her state of emotion is not exhausted. This is an indication that the issue of perception and identity in mergers make staff feel as if they are not capable of doing certain tasks because of who they are in terms of gender, colour, race or creed. During a merger staff cannot deal with uncertainty surrounding.

CHAPTER 5

THE MERGER OF TECHNIKON FREE STATE AND VISTA UNIVERSITY WELKOM CAMPUS

5.1 Historical background of the TFS and VUWC

Vista University Welkom Campus (VUWC) was established in 1981 as one of eight Vista University campuses, spread over three provinces, as an attempt by the apartheid government to ensure that urban black South African's seeking tertiary education could be accommodated within their townships. Vista campuses were based in Bloemfontein, Daveyton (East Rand), Mamelodi, Port Elizabeth, Sebokeng, Soweto and Welkom.¹³ The VUWC, which originally focused on distance learning, had an academic structure consisting of five faculties, namely, Arts; Management; Science; Law; and Education – with faculty deans situated at Vista campuses around the country.

Technikon Free State (TFS) was established in 1982 in the city of Bloemfontein, situated some 150 kilometres away from the VUWC. The TFS has an academic structure comprising of three faculties, Engineering; Information & Communication Technology; Management Science; and Health & Environmental Science. The academic programmes and structure of the two institutions varied greatly, which created challenges when it came to them merging.¹⁴

5.2 The merger of TFS and VUWC

In 2003, merger negotiations began between the TFS and VUWC after national government announced that institutions of higher learning must merge. According to De Wet (2004) the National Ministry of Education granted TFS the legal rights to declare that the VUWC

¹³ From Wikipedia, Free Encyclopaedia. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vista_University.

¹⁴ De Wet, E. 2004. Managing mergers of Higher Education: an investigation into the importance of key management activities and their contribution to the process. (Unpublished).p 9

become a fully-fledged campus of the new Central University of Technology (CUT). This was seen as an opportunity for the VUWC to move into new areas in which it had not participated before. A planning committee was established which involved management staff from those differing divisions of the two institutions; from this process the CUT, Free State was born.

VUWC was an academically oriented institution, while the TFS was more technically oriented. When general higher education institutions merged the Department of Education (DoE) instructed institutions to close down their distance learning programmes with the VUWC branch being one of them. However, in the case of the merger between TFS and VUWC, the newly formed CUT was allowed to continue with distance learning programmes, with the condition that those programmes originally offered by VUWC would be included as part of new programmes offered by the CUT.

However, the two newly merged institutions still manage their budgets/finance separately, which by itself has an impact on the daily operations, in areas such as maintenance, travelling and knowledge sharing; given the 150 kilometres distance between the two. This has impacted negatively on the old VUWC, as on occasion they have been left out of important matters; such as departmental meetings. Though there are some means of communication such as video-conferencing, telephones and e-mail, which can alleviate these problems, they are not effective enough in dealing with those operational issues addressed most often.

Furthermore, De Wet (2004) highlighted that the merging of the HEI in South Africa was the sole decision of government, with advice given mostly by the CHE and other ad hoc working groups; the aim of which was to mould the higher education landscape in South Africa into a single unified system. It is interesting to note however that as De Wet (2004) states, “there is no single factor that underpins the case for mergers or for new institutional and organisational forms. Instead there are a range of factors linked to the specific context of different groups or institutions” (NPHE 2001:88)¹⁵ with both the CHE and NPHE supporting this argument.

In the case of the merger between the TFS and VUWC, the above argument was upheld when the following arguments according to De Wet were indicated as the primary reasons for the merger:¹⁶

¹⁵ De Wet (n. 3) p.9

¹⁶ These are reasons that were formulated during the planning of a merger at CUT, which some could sound contradictory to the discussion. De Wet, E. 2004. Managing mergers of Higher Education: an investigation into the importance of key management activities and their contribution to the process. (Unpublished).p 19

- The CUT plays an important role in the province by providing career-focused and workplace oriented programmes, and in a number of aspects functions above the national average for polytechnics.
- The CUT had enjoyed reasonable success in transforming a historically white institution into a multicultural organisation.
- VUWC has few students in science, engineering and technology.
- The merger would provide the CUT with growth and opportunities.
- The merger would improve the CUT's staff equity profile.
- The merger would further stimulate the fruitful interaction that the CUT has with industry.

5.3 Processes of the merger

According to De Wet (2004), the CUT merger was characterised by three phases. The pre-merger, which is the start-up; the transitional phase which is a period after the date of merging; and the post-merger phase, with each phase having its specific outcomes and timeframes.¹⁷

5.3.1 The first phase: pre-merger

The purpose of this phase – which took eight months to complete – was to determine the rules of engagement, to plan various events in the merger and to create operational stability regarding key business processes that had to be in place on the date of merging. The most important outcomes of the first phase were to:

- Create a memorandum of understanding, a framework where structures accountable for managing the mergers could operate.
- Create a Joint Integration Task Team (JITT) consisting of staff, unions and students, to be able to manage day to day operational activities related to the merger.
- Establish working groups, working on specific tasks such as finance and human resources. The working groups are formed by professionals in respective areas of both institutions that were knowledgeable on processes, systems, infrastructure and procedures.

¹⁷ De wet (n. 3) p.9

- Plan for various events of the mergers. There was a time frame of 20 months planned for the merger and a development plan for the VUWC that had to be approved by the CUT council.
- Create operational stability. This outcome dealt with the alignment of processes, systems, policies and procedures. This emanated from the JITT which had to create operational stability for the period just after the official merger date. Focus was on integrating payrolls, getting student registration processes operational, setting up the IT infrastructure, making sure the financial controls were in place and an making sure the operating budget was approved.

5.3.2 Second phase: transitional phase

The transitional phase took eight months to complete after the physical date of merging, which was announced by government legislation on 2 January 2004. The purpose of this phase was to move the VUWC based staff from their original geographical location to their new CUT home. The important outcomes of this phase as mentioned were to:

- Define a future management model for the campus and determine levels of integration for the Bloemfontein campus.
- Define a service delivery model for the campuses. This was to describe how services would be rendered at the Welkom campus and who would render the services.
- Create an organisational structure for the campus, based on the service delivery model, which was to design organisational structure for the academic and support services staff.
- Align a condition of service. There was a significant gap between the conditions of services of staff at both campuses. These gaps led to the process of negotiation and representation which indicated that staff were not entirely happy.
- Position VUWC staff in the new CUT organisational structure by way of applying new conditions of service and applicable remuneration policies and principles.

5.3.3 Last phase: post-merger phase

Here the focus was on the development of campuses which would overlap for about three months. The reason for this was that decisions within the transitional phase had to be made within the broader context of the future development of the new campus; this phase

commenced in July 2004. According to De Wet some of the outcomes completed in this phase were:

- The completion of a strategic development plan for the campus, which outline future development of the campus, running for a period of at least 5 years.
- The completion of an operational plan for the campus, with the aim of attaining financial sustainability within a three year period from the date of merging; as stipulated to the DoE.

5.4 The merger as interruption in the CUT institution

The merger between the two institutions came as an interruption of their ongoing activities resulting in effects on staff emotions, their frames of reference, their performance as well as their families being impacted upon. Employee's cues were also affected, in so much that they would have to take action to make sure that their frames of reference make sense.

Whatever the synergies between the two institutions, there are challenges that the newly formed institution will have to deal with presently as part of an ongoing process. The CUT has to merge distinct cultures, identities, programmes and skills that, if not dealt with, will cause friction and conflict at all levels of the institution(s); from the individual to the departmental level. In sense making terms this conflict is seen as an interruption which cripples or affects the performance in an institution.

When one looks at the impact of the merger on employee emotional well being, one can see that it has led to institutional imbalances in the form of physical and psychological implications – in the form of excessive stress – for employees which is destructive and can lead to impairment in employee performance. The symptoms of excessive stress include irritability, low performance, irrational and negative thought and increased autonomic arousal. The reason behind many of these symptoms is that when the environment becomes threatening, and interruption cannot be controlled, autonomic arousal increases. This is known as the stress response, or the "fight or flight" response, which is a complex psycho-physiological arousal in response to demands from the environment. An interesting point to note is that autonomic arousal is psychological; with increased stress also having psychological causes (Linde, 2005).

The changing environment in higher education is one which is uncertain and triggers a stress or emotional response; this however depends entirely on the way the environment is

perceived. Some may perceive it as a harmful situation where they will lose their job, or where they are unfairly treated because of their gender, race or qualification. Whereas to others it can be perceived as a challenging or enjoyable situation, while there are also those whose academic work is not the only source of their income. As a merger is an ongoing process, it can increase job uncertainty for employees through their attitude being affected.

With this background in place the purpose of this study is to understand how the sensemaking perspective (Weick 1995) can be used to identify and measure the autonomic arousal which has led to staff performance being lower. The effects of this merger reveal how staff can become automatically aroused when their arousal becomes systemic, which in turn indicates how staff autonomic arousal can affect their performance. This is because failure stories of mergers are complex narratives, based on three levels of interruption: institutional, departmental and personal which is how the merger will be measured.

CHAPTER 6

METHODOLOGY OF THE EMPIRICAL STUDY

6.1 Respondents

The respondents in this study are nine staff members forming part of the academic and non-academic staff of the CUT. One of the respondents is on the CUT Management Committee (MANCOM), two members are in middle management, one forms part of the student services unit, another forms part of the support services of the institution, two form part of lower level management in the CUT, one forms part of curriculum development and another forms part of the CUT's e-learning division.

The selection of staff was done in such a way so as to include staff from both of the former institutions; those being the TFS and VUWC respectively and consisted of seven males and five females. This was done in line with the objective of the study focus on how gender, race, age and qualification levels were affected by the merger. All interviewees had an idea of what a merger was, some from reading about it, while others had seen it in other organisations which had merged. Though the participants had a lot of practical experience and tacit knowledge between them, none of them had been involved directly in a merger of this kind before; thus it was their first time experience.

The selection of interviewees was based on the fact that they were all sufficiently immersed in the merger process; too the extent that they could communicate with ease about what changes and impacts the merger paradigm was having on them as individuals, as an institution and as decision makers. Although the aim was, initially, to sample according to age and gender, it was impossible to do so due to the snowball sampling technique used resulting in some unexpected results.

All interviewees were told beforehand about the nature of the interview and all gave their informed consent. Though a referral type of interview process was followed, interviewees were made aware that participation in the research was on a voluntary basis and that in no way were they to feel compelled or forced into taking part. During the interview itself

candidates were reassured that the information collected would be confidential and would only be used for my personal interview notes. Two of the candidates who took part in the research asked me not to publish their interview as verbatim.

The interview technique was chosen because of its appropriateness for understanding the construction, beliefs and opinions expressed within the given situation. The procedures followed as part of this process, were the ones of Meulenberg-Buskens (1993) which helps one to formulate an effective, scientific but user-friendly interview technique. Meulenberg-Buskens calls this the Free Attitude Interview Technique which involves asking just one question to initiate the conversation with the respondent; based on the reflective and responsive method of questioning. The conversation is then followed up by clarifying questions to cut off digression and gently force the respondents to think thoroughly about what they are saying. In the event that the conversation is slow and not warming up, a reflective summary is used to encourage further conversation as well as to check with the interviewer whether his/her understanding of what they are saying concurs with the question being asked. Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes to an hour.

The interviews were based on the question of “how different categories of staff were affected by the merger, as evident by the change of direction in their sensemaking approaches, especially those emotional aspects that led to poor performance.” The following open questions were asked as reflective and responsive from the main question:

- What experiences do you have in this merger?
- To what extent do you agree with the mergers in Higher Education.?
- How has the merger integration changed you?
- What experience do you have about the merger in general? Can you give some examples?
- What impact would the merger have on staff?

These questions were used in line with different levels in the CUT together with the objectives of this study, for instance how staff in management, middle level and lower level were affected based on personal, institutional and decisional levels.

6.2 Data collection

Merger in higher education, especially in South Africa, is a new concept. In order to understand how staff performance is affected by a merger in this context, I chose to conduct a qualitative study about staff at the CUT in an attempt to make sense of the interpretation of the meaning staff members bring, based on their personal experience and involvement in the merger process. I thought that it would be worth while to interview some of the staff who formed part of the merger planning phase and entire process and to use their stories as qualitative research practice; it should be noted that not all the respondents formed part of merger planning phase. Due to time constraints and the nature of the interviewees selected, the qualitative method was thought to be the most applicable.

Van Maanen (1983), as quoted by Valpola (2001:9) views the qualitative method as an array of interpretive techniques which seek to describe, decode, translate and otherwise come to terms with the meaning, not the frequency, of certain more or less naturally occurring phenomenon in the social world. The qualitative method deals with the in-depth interview. An interview will help to clarify how individuals construct meaning and significance in light of their situation from the complex personal framework of the beliefs and values which are acquired in their lives to explain the merger.

The snowball interview technique was used to collect data from the respondents; snowball sampling relies on referrals from the initial subject to generate additional information. According to Hanneman (2000:8) the snowball interview technique begins with focal actors, where the actor is asked to name some ties to other actors. These named actors are then tracked down and asked for some of their ties and so on. The process continues until it has been decided to stop, either because of time constraints or when no new actors are identified. It is difficult to achieve closure to snowball.

The limitations of this method are that, firstly, the presence and numbers of isolates can be very important features of populations for some analytic purposes; it can also overstate the connectedness and solidarity of the population. Secondly, there is no guaranteed way of finding all of the connected individuals in the population. While this technique can dramatically lower search costs, it comes at the expense of introducing bias because the technique itself reduces the likelihood that the sample will represent a good cross section of the population. Thirdly, the weakness of this technique is that it is time-consuming, especially within the research context.

However, even in light of these limitations, in this case it is felt to be relevant for the study as only a few staff will be involved to ensure staff participation and contributions. The technique was therefore chosen because it involved the respondents in contributing and discussing their views and experiences observed during the merger. It also provides an opportunity for the participants to realise what it is that is still lacking in the merger process which needs to be discussed further; thus helping them to construct meaning. Some interviewees were more talkative than others, some were good in narrating the events while others preferred to just answer the exact questions and keep to the point.

An e-mail was sent to the first person to avoid the “secretary barrier” and to save time in discovering whether the candidate was interested; an outline of my study was given and information as to why I was conducting the interviews and participants had to respond via e-mail if they were willing to take part. I interviewed nine staff members because after the ninth one, I began being referred back to the same people I have already interviewed; and thus would have begun having a repetition of the facts.

Candidates had to reflect on their experiences before and after the merger. They were to reflect on what had changed and what had become different in terms of their own meaning construction. They had to also indicate what the impact of the merger had meant to them based on the relevant objective levels: in terms of individual (personal), institutional and decisional levels. Conversations were recorded through taking notes; these were collected and time was monitored for the flow of the conversation. Conversations took place in participant’s respective offices so as to ensure that they were comfortable with the situation and not put unduly under pressure.

Data collection is in itself a learning process of experience and reflection-conclusion-new experimentation. The overall perception of the interview process was positive and interesting. The general feeling from the participants was that they were happy that one of their staff had taken the initiative to research this topic, as it was felt by the participants that the institution is being affected and does need some solutions concerning this matter.

6.3 Data analysis

Data was analysed using the Textual Oriented Discourse Analysis (TODA) (Duncan, 1993). The recorded conversation was transcribed verbatim, excluding those who did not give consent. Each transcript was analysed three to four times in order to make sure that it was understood correctly. A comparison of the transcriptions was then made with the originals

(taken during the interview) in order to ensure greater accuracy. The gists of the conversations were that interviewees felt that they had benefited greatly from this exposure to the merger and the impact it had had upon their lives. From the transcripts, one could deduce that they had changed since the merger occurred.

The interviewees seemed to enjoy this conversation as it allowed them to reflect on their experience, grounded identity, social aspects, and extracted cues. The objectives of this study and in combination with levels of sensemaking were used to measure how the merger had affected the staff and how much autonomic arousal has risen. Some of the respondents even concluded that the interviews opened their eyes to elements that were overlooked during the merger itself.

Verbal and textual evidence was used to confirm or refute the findings. For those findings that were not-so-obvious, the levels of individual, institutional and decisional were used to get to the bottom of the meaning making repertoire; in order to understand and make sense of the textual evidence even further. Sometimes meaning was obvious, at other times one had to extract the meaning from between the lines or re-create the story and the meaning on the basis of circumstantial evidence.

6.4 Limitations

- The first limitation of the interview process is that it was limited to a small number of staff. Though I used the snowball interview technique, the method in itself has disadvantages in this kind of research in that employees know each other and thus some biases could occur; because one interviewee could refer you to another who may share a similar opinion.
- The second limitation is the turbulent environment at the CUT which created some barriers, where staff performance could not be well determined due to the complex nature of this environment. Even though the purpose of the research was mentioned, it was still not easy for some to give information. This contributed negatively to the results of my research, but also reflected that as the CUT operates from within a highly regulated structure it has also had an effect on performance.
- Thirdly, lack of frequent communication, which is an ongoing problem between both the staff and the employer, affected my study as there was some information that one could not find due to the institution operating in a highly regulated structure.

- Finally, the numbers of staff interviewed are not statistically significant enough to draw generalised conclusions from. Therefore, the results of the interviews may only be taken as useful in as much as they contextualise the insights from literature and provide a platform for interpretation in light of sensemaking theory.

CHAPTER 7

THE MERGER THROUGH THE EYES OF THE INTERVIEWEES

7.1 Introduction

In this chapter the empirical findings will be discussed within the framework of autonomic arousal as conceptualised in sensemaking theory. To recap, in conditions of autonomic arousal issues occur surrounding leadership, identity construction and serious miscommunication which may drive social interaction into an increasingly acrimonious situation. A loss of sensemaking capacity takes place and the performance of the entire organisation grinds to a halt. From the interview process the following dimensions became clear: gender; experiential; positional; situation and racial. To organise the analysis of the interview results, they will be divided between individual and institutional levels.

7.2 The gender dimension

7.2.1 Individual level

It was found that females were affected by the merger in a negative way. The morale of female workers in the two campuses is low, in the sense that men are still occupying the higher level positions in spite of the merger having taken place.

Female Respondent 1 (FR1): “[The] merger did not bring any good things for us; females are still seen as people who cannot make [a] decision. When a female in [a] higher position takes a decision, her gender becomes a concern.”

Female Respondent 2 (FR2): “A merger is a way to show us that we can make it in higher position[s] as women given a chance. It gives us a sense of belonging. This is an opportunity. It is an indication that experience and skills will be recognised. Actually it builds confidence.”

Female Respondent 3 (FR3): “My knowledge indicates that mergers traditionally [have] been dominated by economic consideration, I thought now [that the] merger will focus more on [the] human side instead of male and female separately, which I do not see happening here at the CUT.”

Male Respondent 1 (MR1): “A merger is an activity clouded in mystery [from] which only certain elites [at a] high level will benefit. I found myself developing a very keen interest not as a male or female but as human being that our government is trying to make changes in education but it is [politically] related. A merger came to disrupt our activities and to empower women.

The responses above are both positive and negative, with staff appearing to be unmotivated, anxious and uncertain about their future. Female respondents seemed to view the merger from two angles, highlighted in the responses of FR1 and FR2. FR1 indicates a sense of loss, uncertainty and frustration which hints at a loss of identity. FR1’s reaction to the merger is so negative, that one can draw the conclusion that the merger did not work at all for her; juxtaposed with the response of FR2. FR2 sees the merger offering new opportunities to strengthen partnership working, indicates a sense of hope which is positive and feels there is potential for growth.

These differing views indicate that females saw the merger from an inter-subjective level where sharing and interaction would construct their meaning, allowing them to share and create a common place of interaction. From a sensemaking perspective, this shows that there is currently a lack of meaning construction, as their minds can become clouded by negative thought.

MR1 feels that his identity has been tampered with. To him the merger does not fit with his expected interpretation of the environment, thus disrupting his identity and work processes. In line with this issue, MR1 also indicates that females are not affected, as the situation was intensified to all by the announcement of the merger. In cases such as these, people tend to become sceptical about mergers.

When institutions merge both institutional and individual identities change to a collective identity. The “I” as Weick (1995) mentions changes to “WE”, where interaction takes place and social communication exists. Sensemaking is a dynamic process and changes from situation to situation based on events happening in time and space. In light of this, one must realise that men tend to reflect back on their past experience; in this case where the

management level was solely male dominated. Now due to the merger they resist change as they feel that they can no longer construct meaning anymore due to a loss of identity.

MR1 feels that males should still hold the higher positions in the organisation, rather than females. MR1 regards the merger as a political exercise, which is supported by Hall, Symes & Luescher (2004:28) who indicate that the restructuring of higher education in South Africa is unique as it is driven by a political agenda of transformation; with specific aims to break the apartheid mould of higher education.

Females are marginalised, as they are seen by their male counterparts as not being assertive enough and lacking experience when it comes to higher positions.¹⁸ Jackson and Joshi (2001:211) support the above statement by saying women advance more slowly within the organizational hierarchy and receive lower pay. For those few women who make it to the top of the hierarchy, their experience depends on who they are. They tend to face more barriers than men, an example being the *developmental phase*, if a top management position is entered into by a woman, whereas men do not have to go through this phase.

From a sensemaking perspective, both the male and female construction of identity and individual actions differ from one another with individual values, beliefs and experience being most affected. Males and females, as sense makers, both feel that it is important to maintain their identity. Identity construction is an indication of how staff – both male and female – understand their situation. Merger being the ongoing process that it tends to result in females reacting to what is going on within the institution; with females having certain ideas on how to frame and interpret the situation.

In this case, females tend to feel that they will regain their identity, whereas males feel that they have lost their identity, with the self desire to perceive one as competent and efficient now gone; thus indicating that they (males) are still grounded within their old identity. Weick (1995) argues that to be able to make sense, one has to react on what is going on. Females and males both react and interpret the merger differently. Thus the effect on both male and female workers differs based on the way each group constructs their identity.

The way this response is handled has an impact on the emotional level, as indicated when the respondent mentioned that “it is about experience...even at a senior position they are not decision makers...” Thus indicating that the staff have lost their personal control.

¹⁸ Ref to Chapter 2. 2.6.1 How female staffs are affected compared to their male counterparts .p57 par2. and p.58 par. 3 of this study.

When one speaks, caring about someone is not there, that feeling of humanity is not respected. Merger integration creates anger that can lead people to lose respect for one another. Social interaction where one can share and interact with others, where people can mutually agree and understand each other is non-existent.

This is an indication that the merger has influenced personal control, which in turn has had a negative effect on people's jobs. Callan (2003) stated that when individuals are collectively confronted with a stressful or uncertain situation, they are more likely to first appraise the situation, with residual uncertainty then being related to their degree of emotional exhaustion. The above responses lower the morale of staff, which is indicated by the poor attitude towards female workers where males are still gender insensitive.¹⁹

7.2.2 Institutional level

Once again on this level the merger was viewed by staff from differing perspectives. Males saw the merger as a transparent process with females disagreeing, with the majority of staff forming part of the merger process being male. Female staff members do not feel represented at the management level of the institution.

Male Respondent 2 (MR2): “[The] merger did not affect women negatively to my knowledge. [The] merger affected more of management staff because decision needs to be taken, policies need to be changed. We never had time to think of females and males, we treated staff as equal. We worked under pressure where we had six months to complete the first phase. Yes, looking at statistics, most staff has resigned. One cannot tell if this is because of a merger, or [if] it was supposed to happen.”

Female Respondent 4 (FR4): “To think we use to have good salary increase, now everything is blocked. Now we have to spend two years without increment, [it's] unbelievable. No one wants to make [a] decision. [The] merger cannot be viewed in isolation; there are other aspects like finance, gender, equity, social and cultural, distance that affected our performance. How do you perform effectively if your salary is tampered with? [This] just cause confusion and hostility and distrust to management. I become stressed if people cannot realise that [the] merger is not a problem, the problem is how

¹⁹ See chp.2, sub heading: 2.3.1.2The impact of mergers on job uncertainty .p32-33,

we are perceived as staff. Staff have resigned and [the] majority are females because they are taken for granted. I now put my priority to my family.

Male Respondent 3 (MR3) also feels impacted upon in this way as the salary and distance affect his performance. MR3 also indicates the type of negativity that has impacted on their performance. The negativity is characterised by anger in the form of a “don’t care mood and distrust”. While doing so he reflects back on the old institution. His experience of what has happened in the past is used to try to construct meaning for his new context and the new institution.

MR3’s love of work has changed it is no longer viewed as an enjoyable activity. To the respondent merger was used to get rid of individuals who in this case are females. Anger and betrayal is the dominating factor in female’s staff at the CUT. The respondent mentioned that even when they are survivors, the institution does not recognise them as they are not compensated. This creates low morale and job insecurity. The issue of gender disparities when positions are given create bitterness and stress on staff. Women are less appointed in senior positions in academic levels. Most female staff is in non-academic and junior levels that men²⁰

These respondents indicate that at an institutional level there was no time to build or empower staff. There was a breakdown in communication and the staff were left with lots of questions that they were expecting the institutional leadership to assist them with. The staff simply had no say, they were told what to do irrespective of their wants and needs. The way the process was handled indicates a lack of sensitivity for equity, diversity and an absence of human factor knowledge. There was no uniform morale within the institution, which led staff to resign and re-apply for new jobs; it should be noted that this is my perception as I never got answers as to why staff members resign from the CUT. Focus was predominantly given to policies, finances and restructuring, all of which finally impacted negatively on the staff. This further highlights the reasons for their sense of loss, frustration and anger caused by a lack of communication between management and the staff themselves. There seems to be a lack of institutional support, while the institution proclaims to be transparent and share information.

²⁰ see chapter 2, p.52-53

The minister of education gave institutions six months to complete the interim merger. Mosia (2005) indicates that this kind of time factor often has a negative effect on mergers in higher education. Because of the time factor, institutions had to rapidly prioritise their issues. The institutions management ended up putting more focus on the structure of the institutions, financial aspects, change of names and transformation rather than spending focusing on human factor. Dealing with the human factor, in terms of making sense of how performance could be improved, was not seen as a crucial aspect at that time because of the time constraints imposed in which to complete the processes; this lead to lack of information from management²¹ It also seems, from institutional point of view, that the workload on staff increased due to the merger.

Staff at the institutional level had to make a choice as they become affected by being exposed to many things, including the merger itself, combined with the ever increasing shortage of staff. As the ILO report (2001:80) highlights the idea of one job for life no longer exists. The remaining staff needed to make sense to be able to interpret their current situation; this sense did not need to be accurate but rather plausible. In terms of performance staff had to work fast which has the ability to further contribute to affecting their emotional stability. From a sensemaking perspective, this led staff to be selective and to have to make a choice. When we speak about the institution, the individual identity does not exist; the generic levels of sensemaking are not there. My observation is that the CUT management did not deal with the human factor effectively.

According to De Wet (2004:10), the CUT staff profile table – which was part of the first phase of the merger – confirms that female staff were more affected than their male counterparts, indicated by the ratio of females to males. Below is the staff profile of both campuses at the end of 2003 just before the actual merger date (see table 1):

Table 1: CUT staff profile

Staff-Permanent and fixed-term contracts	2004 (Transitional phase)			
	Vista Welkom	CUT		
Academic staff	34	206		
Black	18	53%	52	25%

²¹ See chapter 2, p33 last paragraph

White	16	47%	154	75%
Male	19	56%	124	60%
Female	15	44%	82	40%
Support services staff- Total	40		495	
Black	25	63%	306	62%
White	15	38%	189	38%
Male	20	50%	205	41%
Female	20	50%	290	59%
Total number of staff	74		701	

Staff at the CUT see and notice certain things. They see their salaries being affected and their minds are crowded by what is happening now. They see the product of the merger not the merger process itself. Staff members notice their cues, but they decided not to make something good out of it; they filter only what they want to see.

From a sensemaking perspective staff pay attention to particular cues and link them with ideas from which they can construct meaning to suit their situation and themselves. It is these cues that can help them to keep their confidence and not concentrate on their lowered performance levels. Staff members may start to communicate in groups and try to discuss their situation. In most cases this can lead to staff going on strike because of the influence of the individuals from the groups as expectation develops towards mutual understanding; the process can be chaotic and may become out of control.

Merging two institutions from different towns creates risk, obstacles and confusion. Cartwright and Cooper (1992) indicate that in an organisation there are aspects such as HR systems and managerial viewpoints which can create conflict in a merger if they are not dealt with. Weick (1995) indicates that people become part of the organisation which they end up producing and interpreting from the environment. People are therefore shaped and being shaped by their environment. Female staff members have framed that the merger has affected them badly, whereby their competencies are affected and they label what they see from this to make sense. Staff members start to ask questions, they start to socialise and a network of

inter-subjectivity grows where meaning is shared; they begin to share their frustrations. As their behaviour changes their thoughts are affected.

Valpola (2001) indicate that when people meet, their impression about things changes. This leads to the conclusion that staff of two merging institutions start to interpret their environment differently and begin to share their ideas. It is in this circumstance where cues are interpreted and where most of the time is spent talking rather than working. As events are being interpreted through this process, consuming time, consequently there is a drop in performance. When performance is affected, staff members start to become concerned about their careers. This creates tension between staff as they no longer trust one another.

7.3 Autonomic arousal in the gender context

Autonomic arousal can be interpreted as either pleasant or unpleasant in the context of a merger for both males and females alike. Autonomic arousal in female staff is measured by stress and anger. From the above responses it is clear that there is a lot of stress, anger and emotional exhaustion which will inevitably affect the performance of individuals. Frustration was a major cause of this, often due to a lack of recognition.

7.3.1 Individual level

Signs of arousal at this level are observed through oppression and lack of communication, with arousal being interpreted as unpleasant, negatively affecting performance. Both sickness and stress can be used to measure autonomic arousal in females. From female respondents there is a lot of hesitance and bitterness caused by a perception of a lack of trust. Females are exposed to stress because they feel that they are not able to make a contribution towards the decision making of the institution. Previous experience is also quoted where some think their salaries are being affected. One respondent indicated that her input is not noticed as management tends to think that women in managerial positions should first attend developmental courses.

When there is an increase in arousal, staff tend to focus on change rather than work, investing more on processing resources into whatever task arises. They focus more on their attention as well, speeding up the rate of processing and they ignore other cues that could help to improve their performance.

Arousal can be measured when people begin to ignore those cues that are crucial to their performance, when ignorance grows, when frames become less structured, when absenteeism

increases and levels of rumour and gossip rise. When cues are lost performance drops and uncertainty grows, which shows that the level of arousal in an individual is high. Weick (1995) states that in a normal work environment cues and arousal are lower and interruption is therefore reduced and consequently more controllable; reducing the complexity of tasks and contributing to the abandonment of peoples frames.

Flows that are interrupted will often induce an emotional response which influences sensemaking ability. When a person is not able to make sense it shows that the level of arousal is high; the same is true for emotions. When emotions are aroused in the autonomic nervous system it shows that performance is being affected.

Arousal is triggered by interpretation that occurs in an ongoing activity. This arousal has physiological significance which prepares people for a fight-or-flight reaction and therefore has a psychological effect on them. Because of the uncertainty of change, arousal develops slowly, like a time bomb waiting to explode and when it does performance drops rapidly. This means arousal does not happen abruptly, there is a window of opportunity in which the institution can solve and deal with interruptions, leading people to search for answers to the interruptions.

The CUT staffs autonomic activity was triggered by interruption, which ended up reducing the cues that were available to them at the time of interruption; thus reducing sensemaking ability and focusing attention on the interruption itself. Employee's expectations concerning the merger viewed layoffs as being the number one expected effect of the process. These expectations were also manifested in changes to pay and benefits. For example VUWC had to lose some of their benefits which affected workers family responsibilities. The reorganisation of staff, and their ability to perform daily tasks, was affected as most staff were duplicating positions which led to some posts being merged. As outlined by Applebaum (2002:675), the involvement of both staff and management where affected by a major event over which they had no control with uncertainty forming about their future jobs, family and work relationships. Some see opportunities to improve an existing situation that is considered intolerable, while others see the situation as a threat in the process of actualisation.

The process of sensemaking will help individuals to better improve their situation awareness and its consequent impact on performance. Shared situational awareness, through a common task or environment, can be enhanced through advanced information display. This is based on how individuals interpret their cues and visit their pattern of experience or training. In

situational awareness humans play an important role in adapting and responding to unexpected or unknown situations as well recognising a situation. How they make sense of their situation differs from individual to individual. At the CUT for example, staff make sense of the situation based on factors such as how females were previously treated in comparison to their male counterparts.

At the CUT overall planning was governed by the higher education act, though it was not a sufficient framework as other institutional policies had to be used for this purpose. These policies were used to divide the merger into clear phases which the VUWC staff had to adapt to the CUT conditions of services.

7.3.2 Institutional level

As arousal takes place it slowly gives management time to deal with the situation by addressing the issues of qualifications, salaries, transfers, logos and the mission in order to make decisions. The merger as an interruption at the CUT changed the environment; it was an interruption of an expectation which affected emotion as emotions occur when interruptions occur. Arousal only happens when events take place, once an event occurs this arousal increases. If the institution finds a way to deal with the interruption, autonomic arousal will be diminished. The only way the institution can gauge the level of arousal is by measuring the reaction of the interruption on staff. If this interruption is of a high order it consequently results in a high level of arousal.

Sensemaking in these instances can help to measure emotions which occur during interruption. Arousal occurs when staff pay attention to the interruption where their cues and frames are reduced. Weick (1995) indicated that if cues on the periphery are crucial contextual cues for the centre, then the loss of those peripheral cues may mean that the person doing the project gets better at performing. Arousal absorbs information processing capacity which decreases the efficiency of complex thought processes. Autonomic arousal occurs following the interruption which is measured by the degree of organisation of the action that is interrupted and the severity of its interruption.

Autonomic arousal is triggered when focused on things that affect information processing capacity; attention is focused on the interruption of events. When arousal consumes scarce information processed capacity it also reduces the number of cues that can be processed from that particular activity. If management within the CUT become more involved in meetings among themselves and do not include all staff, it creates systemic autonomic arousal which

increases levels of stress on staff as they feel left out. Arousal can alert people to potentially threatening events which allow the institution to deal with that threat. For example, if the institution sees that staff are complaining about salaries, where unions end up intervening, management of the institution must deal with the issue before it gets out of hand to avoid strike action which affects performance. If the threat is not dealt with, it registers in the individual consciousness of staff and interferes with their ongoing cognitive activity, which can lead to the omission of important cues for task performance which in turn decreases cognitive efficiency.

7.4 The experiential dimension

7.4.1 Individual level

Female Respondent 1: “It seems to me males earn more than us. That is my perception. My experience made me who I am, even though [I] am not [an] expert or not having long service, but my performance is good my experience taught me that.”

Female Respondent 2: “This to me is stress. When I interact with the more experienced staff, I’m...not welcomed. There is a perception that because I am less experienced I cannot perform well. Why in [a] HEI [do] we still think of experience as the only measure, what about those experienced ones who are old, won’t they retire in some instances. I think [the] merging of two different institutions affects our sense of belonging. How can I be experienced in someone’s field? This has nothing to do with [the] merger it is about us as staff that we do not appreciate one another much and the institution.”

Female Respondent 4: “My perception is that as [a] female we earn less than males. Even also I suspect colour or race play a role on salaries.”

Male Respondent 2: “As experienced staff, we are in the middle of a merger trying to cope with uncertainty. My question is how can I as an experienced qualified person, predict the future, how can we fill the positions with good staff, I was not involved in the planning of merger where I could have suggested that we establish an ongoing communication, implement [a] long term strategic plan and be aware of the potential changes. This depends on what [we with] more experience can do for this institution. Yes we are affected also because with our experience we cannot contribute as we wish. Staff are getting older and retire. [The] challenge of working with less

experience is bad. They are the *millennium [generation]*, you cannot tell them to slow down.”

Individuals are affected differently depending on the type of work that they do. Staff holding higher positions within the CUT see themselves as the founders of the institution, where they have a say in all the decisions to be made. As the human factor has to be considered in a merger, this problem became the reality of the CUT. If one looks at the way the merger was announced to the staff, it then also created personal issues, as some staff felt neglected while others felt their identity and the position they were holding did not put them in a position to be recognised. One of the young female respondents indicated that the merger has had an effect on her, due to the fact that when she compared her qualifications with that of one of her male counterparts, there was a vast difference between them. This shows one that a young female, who is less experienced, has been affected by merger.

My interpretation of this is that females see the merger as being predominantly gender insensitive. Young females, who are less experienced, in terms of being new to the institution, feel intimidated by their male counterparts who are more experienced. This indicates that though a merger is an ongoing process, there are staff members who still find themselves caught in the middle and surrounded by confusion.

As stated by Nathan (2004:183), what other staff do not realise is that people shape and are shaped by their environment. Staff members still identify themselves with the past, this past history as Weick indicated – in the form of an extra-subjective level – can influence the anticipated change in the status of the group, where individuals start to make references. As stated by Weick 1995 (as cited by Kujala and Weinmann 2003:18-19) this sometimes leads the individual's perception to be influenced by their experience, attributes, motives and objectives.

The young female respondent uses her frames which are derived from traditional work to make sense of the situation. When one links this response with “the drop your tool” analogy from (Weick, 1995), one realises that professional people who are involved in a merger become aware of the new and threatening situation. When the order to merge was received from government, it was difficult for them to change. It was difficult for the employees of both institutions to drop their tools which they had been carrying with them their entire lives. Staff members associate the tool, which in this regard is their experience, as their own identity. It was difficult for staff to change from what they had been doing for years to

something new. To them the analogy of “drop the tool” meant to drop what is a part of their professionalism, their experience and skills. This move created uncertainty and a lack of trust towards the new institutional management. It also became difficult for staff to unlearn their old ways of doing things and to adjust to the new ways as well.

The male respondent (MR2) still carries a somewhat positive perception concerning the merger to some degree. He regards the merger as an ongoing process that should be measured accurately. However, there is a feeling of insecurity and demoralisation that his experience is not recognised anymore; his level of trust has been affected. This indicates that individual's within the CUT feel helpless, that they have lost their personal control, which in turn reflects a low self-image. Mergers are seen as entities which are bias towards the positions and experience of staff.²² These respondents display the signs of mixed feelings which can lead to confusion if they are not properly controlled.

As Parris and Vickers (2004) mention, if experience is positive, then positive emotions are likely to follow in the sensemaking process. However in this study, the respondent's experiences tend to be more negative which will be followed by negative emotions. As colleagues they should work harmoniously together, but it seems that this is not the case, which explains the frequent expressions of sadness and the resignations.

There are many signs that indicate a resistance to change from staff, shown by their negative responses which allude to this resistance. For example, VUWC staff feel that they are losing their autonomy and culture to the CUT. This is based on their perceptions – drawn from looking at the reasons as to why the CUT and VUWC merged – as they wanted to become equal partners, not with one dominating the other.

7.4.2 Institutional level

Female Respondent 3: “In [a] higher education institution, we deal with teaching, learning and research. This merger has effect more on both sides, for example, staff who are more experienced are nearing retiring age which will be another challenge to the institution. The young ones are affected because they feel threatened by working in an environment where the old want to be heard. (This has nothing to do with age, if I understand you correctly, by less experience. Because you can be old and be less experience, am I right? Can you elaborate). Yes we cannot differentiate culture and

²² See chapter 2; 2.5.2The impact of merger on trust. P52-53 of this study

reality. In my culture man is always right, but now you find this young staff coming to you thinking they can tell you how to do things. I contributed a lot to this institution.”

Female Respondent 5: “[I] value my degree and I feel am still capable to learn and gain more experience, but the environment that I work in does not allow me to see the future of my career. I think the institution does not do enough for us less experienced staff because we are in lower positions even if we survive the merger, we are not seen as [the] potential staff of tomorrow.”

Male Respondent 4: “I believe we know merger goes with retrenchment and transformation. Merger causes tremendous change and loss in institutions. On our campus before [the] merger we had positions that were vacant due to financial constraints; they were not advertised and filled. When [the] merger came, staff became anxious and staff who were more experienced resigned. It was a blow to some of us as institutional knowledge was being taken out. Staff who are less experienced yes they feel insecure as they had to be doing jobs higher than their level of experience. Staff started to communicate and we try to speak in one voice.”

Resignation of more experienced staff whether it was because of the merger or not causes a tremendous amount of stress to be placed on the less experience staff. When stress was out of control, the level of autonomic arousal was high, which led to low productivity and reduced job satisfaction. Applebaum (2005: 674), states that stress affects perception and judgement. Thus the less experienced staff lost control and became uncertain of their future. Even though Applebaum (2005:675) indicates that this could be an opportunity for the less experience staff to improve in an existing situation, some still see it as a threat. From sensemakings inter subjective level, it is realised that staff start to connect with one another; they share their frustration and use what others feel as their point of reference. Though this relationship of communication is personal, it makes the interaction interesting as it lowers the level of stress for staff.

There is a further perception that management are not flexible, kind or understanding towards staff who have survived the merger by not resigning. According to the respondents staff do not see much potential for future growth or job advancement. This causes staff to focus more on their career rather than on their performance. As Applebaum (2005) indicates, staff become withdrawn and upset which finally affects their performance. The loss of more experienced staff affects the less experience ones. Tension and distrust increase on less

experienced staff and if not controlled can lead to systemic autonomic arousal (Schweiger & Denis, 1991). For less experienced staff self-esteem is affected as there is no one to guide or mentor them, thus leading to anger. Further anger is caused over management for not being kind to retained staff and recognising that they as survivors of the merger also need attention.

7.5 Autonomic arousal and levels of academic qualifications and positions

7.5.1 Individual level

Male Respondent 3: “Duplications of tasks on campuses make staff to develop [a] fear of losing their jobs. The approach of letting staff who survive in the merger was not well planned. Academic identity is more important as that will increase staff performance but if one loses her/his identity performance will be affected. I think people should be given [a] chance to what they feel comfortable within understand that it will be more staff for less job. Let the government solve it, they started it. During the era of apartheid we were so happy before we came here.”

There is a lack of trust between the staff and leadership. This partly due to a shortfall of literature focused on managing merged organisations which had an influence in this case; thus interruption increased the level of autonomic arousal. If the interruption is not controlled, it will lead to systemic autonomic arousal; as the situation of uncertainty progresses interruption accumulates.

In this case, the impact of the merger on staff qualification is ongoing. As most staff resigned, staff are now having to act in positions which are above their present qualification levels. This increases stress and reduces emotional capability. Ongoing performance is thus affected as one has to do extra jobs beside the one that is stated on one's job description.

7.5.2 Institutional level

Female Respondent 5: “As [a] higher education institution qualifications of staff are important. [The] merger wave is a challenge not only to staff but also to the economy out there. This merger wave was caused by government when they came with merging of higher education which was a forced merger. The two institutions that merged have different staff with different qualifications it is a fact that [the] impact of [the] merger on staff is related to [the] level of academic qualifications. For instance, [the] focus of CUT now is research based. This was not the main area of [the] merger

during planning, but the circumstance forces the institution to respond to the needs of the country. Some of the staff will feel as if [the] merger impacted negatively as they are not interested in conducting research, but that is how things are now. Part of [the] change has to include the vision of the future. What is happening is people must be made aware of the core-responsibilities of change.”

Respondents feel that the institution does not care about their staff and that management contradicts themselves by the statements which they make. For instance, the CUT management released a memorandum which says that an employee should not act for more than eight months in a particular position, according to the institutional policy and labour law of South Africa. However, people at the ground level, in some cases, have been acting in a particular position for two years or more without compensation. How does one perform if the institution does not recognise you? A further female respondent states:

“I acted in this position as a senior person doing all the tasks, coming up with decisions on how to build this institution and no one cares, is it because I am a woman? Where they feel my contribution is stupid.”

By looking at this response, it shows a feeling of anger, betrayal and a loss of trust. Management should not ignore such behaviour as it is a threat to someone’s performance and health, which is measured by job insecurity, absenteeism, low morale and aggressiveness. Different types of ignorance can be measured for example: insufficient information; lack of confidence in the information and complexity growth. These being in terms of where information overload and ambiguity exists, where there is a lack of a conceptual framework for interpreting information and equivocally where there are several factors competing. All of which lead to the creation of an institution engage in high arousal.

The effects of mergers on individuals can be understood by looking at people who feel helpless, have a loss of self-control and carry a low self-image. The issue of qualification and experience of staff has nothing to do with the merger impact on higher education but rather with gender mobility. The opportunity for job mobility results from being the right person in the right place at the right time. This is related to the gender issue where men and women hold different jobs and positions. As Haveman (2005) asks “do the positions occupied by men and women account for the effects of organizational dynamics on men’s and women’s career mobility? With this in mind, when one looks at the managerial posts in higher education, one can observe that most of them are still distinctly gender segregated.

Staff possess knowledge, skills and abilities that are germane and thus essential for the effective operation of organizations. When institutions merge, job qualifications and positions are affected where staff resists this change. The merger has impacted more heavily on the qualifications and positions held by women, as institutions are still male dominated organisations. As stated previously, most staff resign or take voluntary retrenchment to avoid the chaotic situation of the merger; which can negatively affect these staff when they are forced to look for new jobs. When institutions add new programmes, there should be steps in place to be able to accommodate them.

7.5.3 Decisional level

Female Respondent 3: “Honestly, this institution still operates in an old management style. It is not the issue of [a] female being oppressed. It is the issue of management resisting change and not [being] able to deal with [this] ambiguous situation.”

For the institutional management of the CUT it should be essential to search for a rational understanding of the lowered staff performance and why it has been affected. This cognitive process is predominantly characterised by problem solving and explanation. The central findings of the analysis are that experienced staff feel more threatened amongst themselves, rather than with their less experienced counter parts from the two institutions. Interviews indicated that they started to pay attention to what others were doing. On the institutional level this study will thus help the CUT to understand:

- How both of the former institutions must adapt to the changing environment and contribute to reshaping their environment.
- What the institutional structures and mechanisms are that will facilitate or inhibit this adaptation.
- How these various structures and processes will enable the institution to create a “workable level of certainty” (Leedom 2001) when dealing with the situational ignorance and ambiguity.

On this level, sensemaking helps the institution to realise that culture is grounded in identity construction when staff want to know “who we are and who the others are”. This indicates that identities of the one are related to the identities of the other. Sensemaking helps to reduce ambiguity by creating a shared understanding of important issues which are context specific. This will help the CUT to engage in different types of social comparison between the two merged institutions to make a significant decision concerning the integration process. As

stated by Vaara (2000), sensemaking helps to build emotions that develop when staff are confronted with the news of mergers. Sensemaking is however not solely based on cognitive processes it also involves emotional, political and performance factors. It is through the sensemaking process that understanding is achieved by explaining unexpected events.

Alas and Vadi (2004) mention that in certain health sectors in which studies were conducted in the Soviet Union– in order to increase the overall ability to learn and to implement change faster – they preferred to employ younger people. Thus it was not easy for people older than 45 to get a job. This affected performance because due to the birth rate, the work force was ageing. When comparing this with the institutional situation in South Africa, young people, when one looks at the generation gap, are not yet stable enough. These young people want to climb the ladder quickly; they want to see themselves in a high level position, for them it is all about their career and not about their work performance.

7.6 The racial dimension

7.6.1 Individual level

Female Respondent 2: “[The] CUT is a diverse institution. This is not based only on staff but even to students. Race in this institution is a problem that has lost its battle. The problem is it is not easy to lose what you had for decades and start on a new thing. When we look at the geographic market of the institution, the location, race is still an issue. The impact might be negative or positive depending on which way one wants to see it. Yes race determines the extend of autonomic arousal. If we look at issue of language, the institution has to accommodate three languages, while some of the procedures and documents from the institution are still in the language which was dominating. It is sensitive because there is a clash of interest among staff. This causes tension as some staff feel they cannot express themselves in Sotho, Afrikaans or English. Some meetings become chaotic.”

Male Respondent 2: “Culture is important in [an] institution as it has influence on how [the] merger impacts on staff performance. [The] merger is seen as a racial factor because in higher education [the] merger came as a way that government wanted to redress the imbalances of the past by merging disadvantaged with advantaged institutions irrespective of distance between them. For example the distance between Welkom and us here is not conducive for daily performance. I feel I have lost my control on some tasks because everything is now addressed in terms of equity and

diversity. Culture of the two institutions is affected. We lost our autonomy and identity. There is a lot of uncertainty on how must we perform.”

There is a lot of hesitance and uncertainty which emanates from the racial issue. As uncertainty grows it affects the personal control and emotions of the staff involved which leads to confusion. If staff are confused, they become emotionally exhausted, especially when trying to decide whether race has added to the high level of autonomic arousal or not, thus performance is affected. When the level of emotional exhaustion is high, job satisfaction and personal control become low and the level of performance decreases; characterised by a U-shape on the Yerkes-Dodson curve (Schweiger & Denis 1992; Applebaum, et al., 2000)²³. Thus job uncertainty is related to emotional exhaustion and emotional exhaustion is related to job dissatisfaction.

7.6.2 Institutional level

Male Respondent 4: “[The] merger affects [the] organisational culture, decision making and leadership of the institution. It is believed that most mergers are done to increase [the] number of productivity and reduce redundant staff. This change has impact on the CUT staff as they need to have new leadership. Because of this change some staff decide to leave the institution, to some anxiety builds up and to others performance becomes low. Because of this one institution wins [and] one loses. This affects [the] institution, as it was not easy for them to deal with [the] cultural differences. For example, [the] CUT still operates with leadership from [the] same location and same culture and professional background, this make a great uncertainty [for] staff.

The impact of the merger has been a shortage of teachers from a particular racial group. Jackson and Joshi (2001:210) indicate that substantial evidence shows that the job performance of black employees is evaluated at a slightly lower level when compared to white employees for both objective and subjective measures. They further gave an example of military personnel; when peer ratings were used, women were rated lower than men even though their supervisor’s ratings revealed no performance difference. This is an indication that no matter how good your ratings are, if your supervisor has not come to terms with the racial and cultural clash, individual performance will still be affected.

²³ 23 chapter 2, p 27

CHAPTER 8

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

When the merger between the CUT and VUWC is analysed in terms of sensemaking theory as espoused by Karl E Weick (2004), important aspects of the events become clear. In particular it allows one to analyse the impact of cognitive dissonance on the performance of the organisation and may help to indicate what leadership actions are most appropriate. Through this analysis we see that the CUT suffered a very high level of autonomic arousal. The autonomic arousal had a negative impact on both the individual's and group's ability to define and sustain their identity. As a consequence the leadership competencies were shown to be inadequate. This will now be discussed in this final chapter.

8.1 Autonomic arousal

The cause of high autonomic arousal at the CUT was caused by the responses of staff to the merger, as they experienced it as a major interruption. It interrupted normal work patterns, their personal job understandings and self profiles and as events proceeded it interrupted institutional freedom and autonomy. In sensemaking terminology staff experienced an increase in the loss of their frames and cues. When autonomic arousal rises, stress become high and consequently performance becomes low.

What affected staff performance was that when they performed their organised tasks, these tasks were interrupted by the merger which subsequently affected their flow of frames and cues. In such conditions staff will try to make sense of this uncertain environment by actively constructing meaning. Because they do not have past experience of such mergers, they lack historical references to help them construct sensible approaches concerning their situation; creating a mental void. The longer it lasts the more staff become confused. The more confusion grows, the more it raises tensions and performance is also affected. Productivity becomes low as the environment changes and staff lose performance with an increased level of uncertainty. It thus becomes difficult for them to handle the situation.

According to the Yerkes-Dodson law, initially performance in an uncertain environment increases with cognitive arousal, but only up till a certain point. If arousal becomes too high performance will decrease. And if performance decreases it is an indication that staff output is being highly affected by the merger. This fuels even higher levels of arousal resulting in even more confusion and less output.

If arousal continues to increase relevant cues are not seen. This results in staff morale being low and a lack of performance which will continue to deteriorate. When the level of arousal is high staff members do not respond to constant stimuli, they become angry, bitter and end up being ill. Statistics at the CUT indicated by Discovery Medical Aid (2006) indicate that a high percentage of staff at the CUT were sick because of stress and depression related illnesses.

The focus of this study was on the interruption that is caused by a merger. The effect of the interruption in this discussion is analysed, where information processing capacity decreases the efficiency of complex processes through autonomic arousal and that staff are alert to the threatening events that result. The CUT fails to deal with this threat, which finally leads to low performance of staff where it registers in consciousness and interferes with ongoing processes.

Though interruption causes arousal, arousal reduces cues that can be used in sensemaking and has the potential to escalate cognitive inefficiency (Weick, 1995:101). When arousal increases it is an indication that the situation is out of control where cues become less and where performance starts to be affected. Staff at the CUT started to invest more of their energy on resignation and gossiping and neglected those cues which were important to their performance.

Autonomic arousal was used to measure the effect of the merger on staff performance. These measures were based on the human factor as to how staff members were affected by the merger; whereby their performance, flow of experience and cues became reduced. This aspect was approached from a sensemaking perspective in order to show that when the human factor is ignored during mergers, performance is affected. The measures of cultural differences in mergers, as used by Alas and Vadi (2004) as well as Valpola (2001), differed from the autonomic arousal measures. This is because cultural differences are related to socio-cultural outcomes such as staff commitment, whereas autonomic arousal is related to

staff emotions; which increase when gender, race and qualification issues during a merger resulting in staff not being properly taken care of.

The flow of experience has also been affected, as staff focus is no longer on work related matters. It was observed from all the interviewees, that no one ever mentioned that the merger affected the output of the institution. Staff focus is more on their needs and on what they try to make sense from. From a sensemaking perspective, research has indicated that merging in higher education needs sensemaking theory to be able to interpret the event. It has also been proven by the literature that sensemaking is not often used in higher education.

The older groups in the institutions were mostly male and task orientated, where they held the belief that they must serve their institutions. Opposed to this, the younger ones feel for example “what is there for me if I cannot be a director soon.” The younger employees are not influenced by relationships they have within the institution and thus carry a different perspective when it comes to sensemaking.

The sensemaking framework is mostly applied to other types of organisations in the areas of health, commerce and finance. Little has been applied to higher education, especially in the South African context. Sensemaking has traditionally been used in events such as information system input, cognitive factors such as beliefs, cognitive factors, understanding, decision effectiveness, command intent and planning and helped to put the right data in the appropriate levels. From my analysis to the responses I received, there is a lot of negativity surrounding the institution. Staff feel that communication is bad which is supported by a survey that was conducted in 2004 at the CUT confirming this. Staff do not know what the future holds for them and there is a lot of back stabbing with everyone wanting to gain recognition. In conclusion:

“Life does not become senseless. Instead, it becomes empty. Depending on whether one’s important projects are difficult or easy, tightly organised or loosely organised, rich or lean in substitute pathways of completion, barely learned or over learned, those projects will be easier or harder to interrupt, more or less arousing when interrupted, easier or harder to repair when interrupted and more or less sensible as a result. What we can count on in all of this is that interruptions are consequential occasions for sensemaking” (Weick 1995:105).

8.2 How a merger as interruption affects the CUT staff

A merger as an interruption creates a broken loop for the CUT staff. When the merger occurred at the CUT, the identity control processes of the staff became broken by the merger; as an external event which interrupted the normal continuous process of the CUT. When this loop becomes broken, the identity functions ceases and so too does performance; due to the behavioural changes of staff. Individual behaviour according to Burke (1991:841) may have little or no effect on that situation, it may not influence the way others behave. But when interaction takes place meaningful construction will be affected.

Burkes (1991:841) also mentions that meaningful interaction may fail as others may not recognise the individual's efforts. Some may not pay attention and still others may impose their meaning on the individual's independence. All of these things end up leading to a low self-efficacy and disaffection. This results in staff feeling like they have lost their identity, their sense of self as they say "I don't exist" for example.

Due to the interruption, individual staff cannot perceive the meaning of their situation. One of the female respondents above indicated that she felt that she was not accommodated as her qualification is not recognised by the CUT. This indicates that because of the merger as an interruption, staff see themselves being misunderstood by others. Interpretations become difficult as individuals do not know how to read and understand the meaning which others display. The responses above also indicate that the culture of the institution causes or creates a different meaning. There is also a negative connection that exists between the two campuses in terms of their respective identities and the loss thereof. Burke (1991:842) indicated that feelings of distress occur because one identity adjustment process is interrupted while others are maintained.

8.3 Identity construction becomes difficult

As has become clear from this analysis, the one aspect of sensemaking that has come under the most pressure was that of the individual and collective identity construction. In all the various dimensions discussed above the fundamental issue was huge confusion concerning the individual or the institution's identity. Nothing increases the expedience of autonomic arousal more than when people do not feel a sense of integrity. Identities are not fixed, in fact they are always in migration, but in times of upheaval the speed of change may be too fast for normal adaptation to happen.

In such cases good leadership entails providing frames of reference which make it possible for people to accommodate this increased rate of change. To do this the institution must give scope to the diversity of human preference; which is related to culture, social class, family rearing, education and personality. A sensible institution will realise that individuals are constructing their identities for which the relevant aspect is needed. Institutions have to work differently by letting staff select a preferred pattern or develop a unique pattern that will suit the majority. As Walton (1974) explains, this will allow each staff member free choice and accountability concerning their work.

This indicates that the issue of perception and identity within the merger makes staff feel as if they are not capable of doing certain tasks because of who they are in terms of their colour, creed or race. As staff, during the merger, cannot deal with uncertainty surrounding themselves. Making sense of one's environment is influenced by self conception and personal identification. These are not only issues to be considered during the merger. The same principles apply when the CUT defines and formulates a new mission statement, policies and procedures.

8.4 How the sensemaking perspective can improve the decision-making and leadership of the CUT

The management of the CUT has been affected by the merger, as the merger came to the CUT when the institution was still dealing with some sensitive issues which still needed to be discussed resolved. According to the above responses, staff performance has gone down, frames have become less, cues have decreased and autonomic arousal has become higher. These factors can be attributed to the fact that the merger occurred when staff were not yet ready. When issues surrounding the merger were not addressed, staff created a community of gossip to try to deal with the uncertainty caused by the merger. It was the responsibility of the leadership of the CUT to see that all functions during this period of uncertainty were managed correctly, to avoid the rise of autonomic arousal in both the general staff and management.

It is a crucial element during a merger for the leadership to adapt and to still make firm decisions. Leadership must design and focus on the performance of staff to try to eliminate the ambiguity that has been caused by the merger. This should be done by sharing information, ideas and experiences to help guide the staff and so as to be able to make better decisions. As Weick (1995:17-61) states in his *seven properties*, sharing should be an

ongoing process. The leadership of the institution must involve various levels when making decisions, so as to develop a clearer vision and to be able to better understand the confusion, anger, stress and low morale that staff experienced during the merge.

To be able to make good decisions, leadership must organise and emphasise institutional change for the staff. As Weick (1995) mentions in his *seven properties*, this is enactive of a sensible environment, where staff construction of reality should be done, by assigning authority to events and cues; focus therefore must be on staff and their performance. However, in most cases the leadership during a merger focus on policies, finance and structure with little attention given to the human factor. The leadership of the CUT must be able to make sense of their situation based on their past experience regarding the two merged institutions, which should include cultural aspects. By focusing on this, it will eliminate cultural class and help to restore lost academic freedom.

Sensemaking will assist the leadership in helping them understanding how the institution can adapt to its rapidly changing environment. To be able to make sense personal identity and institutional identity must be addressed with all staff, so that they can understand that in an institution the “I” does not exist but the rather the “WE”. People notice and extract cues from their environment and interpret these cues differently based on their held beliefs. Staff at the CUT are therefore under stress where their focus has been shifted from their cues and their frames have been disrupted by the interruption.

The merger affected the leadership of the CUT tremendously, compounded by the fact that the institution was in a stage of transformation when the merger occurred. The CUT leadership had to make sense of an ambiguous situation, create situational awareness and also understand a situation of that was highly complex and uncertain in order to make decisions. It was therefore not easy for them to form awareness and understanding. Sensemaking theory can provide an alternative response when taking action and controlling the situation. To be able to identify those factors which influenced feasibility, leadership must identify the threats and opportunities that staff are facing such as stress and poor performance; allowing them to see what potential action they can take.

It is through the construction of meaning that a merger as interruption can make sense. According to Weick (1995), making sense of a situation is based on the *seven properties* which both institutions and individuals can use. If sensemaking theory was used in this case, some of the effects such as stress, high emotions, low morale, high absenteeism and intensive

gossiping could have been brought under control. A merger is an ongoing process which lacks accuracy, but one can make sense of this process in a plausible manner. Staff can make sense in these contexts based on what they perceive as plausible according to their past experience.

8.5 Suggestions for future research

There is still a vacuum that needs to be researched based on sensemaking in higher education; particularly in South Africa. Little has been discussed on how sensemaking can be applied to help in the understanding of mergers from other perspectives concerning students and stakeholders. Research is still needed concerning issues surrounding higher education such as merging disadvantaged universities with previously advantaged ones. Higher education in South Africa is a new concept that still has a vacuum to be filled with understanding concerning all spheres of sensemaking. Little has been discussed with regard to cultural differences and the sensemaking process in South African higher education.

It is a belief that two institutions that merge share a common meaning, but that is not entirely the case as there is still an impact on performance. Thus the meaning shared becomes meaningless as there is still uncertainty occurring where frames are interrupted. In order to overcome poor performance, in terms of ignorance relating to people issues, more research should be conducted.

This study does not attempt to undermine what other researchers such as Cartwright & Cooper, (1992); Hay & Fourie (2001), Vaara (1999, 2000, 2003), Valpola (2001) and Wyngaard and Kapp (2004;) have done, but to mention but a few. Rather this study attempts to compliment them by adding another layer which needs to be discussed relating to higher education in South Africa after a merger; dealing with cultural integration, emotional issues and political upheaval in the wake of a merger from a sensemaking perspective.

8.6 Conclusion

In summary, this chapter tried to indicate that a merger gives an institution an opportunity to re-think, re-focus and re-construct meaning where common meaning will eventually be shared among staff. This can only be done when an institution's management share the same ideas as those of their staff members; as it is important to ensure that staff members understand the merger process. Focus during a merger should not only be on cultural

differences but also on people's personal issues to help the institution to make sense and to minimise poor performance.

Uncertainty is seen as a curse in mergers where people feel insecure about their future. When uncertainty occurs, performance is reduced, frames become less and cues change. It is through sense making that the CUT will have the ability to respond quickly. This will allow them to show that even though the merger has made higher education more diverse, and culturally more complex, the application of sensemaking through sharing can still help staff realise that a merger does not mean losing their identity; it means re-constructing meaning and transforming identity towards a collective identity. This will help staff members see that a merger is an ongoing process, which requires a shift in frames and cues to avoid the duplication of tasks. Ill managed changes create a negative impact on performance and affect staff's psychological wellbeing.

The respondents in this study confirm that the leadership of the CUT needs to be more focused on both staff relationships and their relationship with staff. Issues of personal control appear to be less important during a merger but are important after the merger has taken place. This is observed by the type of responses one gets, showing a high level of staff anxiety, stress, anger and powerlessness where their very jobs come under threat and professional competencies are called into a question.

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